SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 521. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 24TH, 1898. [TWOPENCE.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 521. TWOPENCE.

For the Week ending December 24, 1898.

A CHRISTMAS SINNER.

By L. E. Edwards.

"'WHO's this yer Sandy Close I hear the kids talking about, Todd?'

"'Well, I never! Ain't yer never heard of old Sandy that fills the stockin's?'

"'With snowballs?'

"'No, you softy, you!'

"''Cause I was goin' to say he couldn't work none of 'is jokes off on me, 'cause my winter stockin's ain't made me yet, ner shoes, nuther. See?'

"And as the two waifs gave a simultaneous shiver, and huddled together in the wretched dry goods box, which served but poorly to protect them from the driving storm——"

The Editor of the magazine shivered even more simultaneously, if possible, rose, and, going to the shaky stove which did its dispirited best to protect him from the December blasts which whirled through the window and doors of his office, jammed into its handful of

CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

HEARTY GREETINGS FROM THE EDITOR & STAFF

H. F. Mallon '98.

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reals a sheet of paper containing the above-written lines—for I am in haste to inform the intelligent reader that they were his, and not mine. Having accomplished this with the aid of a poker and the most overworked word in the English language, he went back to his desk, for the sixth or seventh time wrote the words, "The Christmas Saint" at the head of a sheet of paper, and began to say hard things at a reflection he suddenly caught sight of in a small but honest mirror which hung on the wall opposite him. That personage was not half bad looking, considering what Nature can do in the line of noses and mouths, but the Editor saw fit to go for him, and call him by the name of Diabolus.

"You think you can do the pathetic, don't you?" he sneered, scowling at the thin, harried-looking face. "The pallid-waif-and-empty-stocking song and dance. Yah! You make me tired."

"The thing's advertised, you know," suggested Diabolus brightly. "Our Christmas number will contain a powerful and pathetic story by an anonymous author—wasn't that the way it ran?"

To this the Editor scorned to reply. Instead, he wrote "The Christmas Saint" on the top of another sheet of paper, and wrote a few lines, carefully avoiding a glance at the mirror for fear of Diabolus' derisive smile. While he wrote he muttered like a stage villain.

"If I were not poor I could get some other fool to write this story. If I were not honest I could steal it. Oh, hang the empty stockings! No, I mean the waifs—great goodness, what a sentiment! Better hang empty heads. I do, every time I meet my creditors. I say, Diab, how about changing the name to 'The Christmas Idiot?' or 'Every Editor His Own Contributor?'"

"A trifle old," observed Diabolus disparagingly.

And then someone opened the door.

The Editor of the local magazine looked up with a glazed eye. It was a good magazine, and he was a good editor, but in the effort to convince the mass of readers of the former and the mass of writers of the latter fact, he was rapidly losing hair; and not only hair, but money, which can replace it; and not only money, but sleep, which can wrap a man in blissful oblivion to the loss of both. And subscribers were few, and bill-collectors many, who passed in and out that creaky-hinged door—rarely, however, closing it behind them.

The incomer, of course, was a young lady, or why should this story be written? A sparkling, smiling, pretty young lady.

She was everything that a girl should be. She brought an atmosphere of violet perfume and a vision of fresh, girlish sweetness into the room; she wore a Gainsborough hat and a Gibsonesque expression of mingled hauteur and bewitching innocence, and there was a fresh, young, wholesome ring in the voice in which she inquired crisply:

"Have you a story written for your Christmas number?"

"No, I haven't," admitted the Editor, wondering if he were an embodiment of conscience, or a contributor, which he infinitely less preferred. But in a trice the pastal white envelope was withdrawn from the stylish little sealskin muff by a shapely ungloved hand, on which a diamond sparkled.

By the primordial instincts planted in the bosoms of the sons of men, he noted that it did not bedeck the engaged finger, and so felt the greater pity as she spoke rapidly, yet shyly, with a catch in her breath.

"I have written a story—oh, I suppose you get stacks of them—but this, I think, is really good. It is about a little street waif, and is called 'The Christmas Saint.'"

"Good gracious," said the Editor with an effort, not to speak, which to him was never an effort, but to say "Good gracious!" as if he were accustomed to it.

"I hope it's good enough, and you're gracious enough to take it," said the girl almost pleadingly, and the Editor wished he were rich.

"You might leave it," he said unhappily.

The girl looked oppressively prosperous. What business had she dropping into literature with her silken skirts and her sealskins?

"My good girl," he said mentally, to see how it would sound, "this magazine can't pay its own office rent or get its Editor's overcoat out of the pop-shop, let alone pay for stories. No, I'd have to explain to her what 'pop-shop' means. Pride or truth must have a tumble, so here goes":

"You can leave it," he said again, "but I'm afraid there's not much chance; the fact is, I've half ordered a Christmas story from another man."

"He is a good writer, I suppose?" Disappointment trembled in her voice.

"Very," emphatically replied the Editor.

When the silken skirt had swished out of the doorway, leaving it looking uncommonly blank, and the high French heels sounded fainter and ever fainter down the stairs, the Editor took up "The Christmas Saint," and his eye was caught by the line written across the top of the paper: "Price £5."

Then the Editor rose in haste, and leaning his cold forehead against the cold window-pane, found relief in the utterance of words which were not "Good gracious!"

"Nothing mean about her, if she is rich, eh?" chuckled Diabolus from the mirror, whereat the Editor frowned and read the manuscript of "The Christmas Saint" very diligently.

The worst of it all was that the story was good. Despite certain traces of the amateur, despite situations slightly impossible and pathos a trifle overdrawn, it was undeniably and exasperatingly good. The Editor was indignant.

"Just the way the world goes! There's a girl who probably sits in the lap of luxury writing stories for which she wants five pounds, and which, bother 'em, are worth it; while a poor literary carpenter struggles vainly to save his journal from disgrace. Now, isn't that life?"

Diabolus nodded, and the Editor, sniffing at the portrait, rose, jammed on his hat, slammed the door after him, and went out in search of pathetic material.

"The worst thing about lies is that you've got to live up to 'em. Now, she'll watch for that Christmas story, and come out it must. Oh, 'Anon,' what crimes are committed in thy name!"

He stopped at the nearest pillar-box, and still with that undefinable feeling of resentment, dropped in a long envelope, addressed simply to "Isabel Allardyce, — Spruce Street."

"That will teach Isabel Allardyce to write better than her betters," he said, and was quickly ashamed of himself.

Then he struck off into that dingy and dreary part of the city in which a rapidly decaying aristocracy and a rapidly rising proletariat are crowded together, cheek by jowl

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Here he saw shrill-voiced children capering excitedly round the scraggy Christmas trees which were exposed for sale, and boldly stripping them of twigs and branches whenever the owners' backs were turned.

But although he noted all that was going on, he saw nothing that could be made into a Christmas story, nothing that might bring tears from sentimental eyes and subscriptions from reluctant pockets.

"I suppose if I were chasing comic material I could find pathos in chunks," observed the Editor, who was so young he could not help but be cynical. "As it is I'm the most pathetic object I've come across yet. These waifs all have stockings—they've got their legs in 'em now, and will have sweetstuff galore in 'em on Christmas Eve. Everybody seems to have overcoats, and homes, and the rest of the luxuries of life—or else seems to be pretty jolly without 'em—a lesson I've not learnt yet. If your 'Christmas Saint' is prowling about, Miss Isabel Allardyce, I think he had better minister to me. Who but a girl who had seen nothing of life would draw such a character—a philanthromaniac who went wandering about at holiday-time, kindling fires on dreary hearthstones, showering unexpected gifts on deserving paupers, and so forth? Here's the true saint of Christmas, he whose good will gets us our turkey, eh, Diabolus?" and he swept his hand sarcastically in the direction of the pawn-broker's shop, opposite which his wanderings had brought him, and whose garishly-lighted window displayed to the public gaze a sad collection of forfeited pledges.

"My watch will be there next week," said the Editor philosophically, then started at some words which sounded close beside him, almost like a continuation of his own speech—words said with a hard little laugh, at which he pricked up his ears:

"I suppose the wedding-ring must go next."

"Oh, Bell, no!" said a distressed young voice, and then a strong breath of sweet, resin-scented air blown in the Editor's face reminded him of what he had scarcely noticed—that he was leaning against a wall of Christmas-trees, which hid him in the deepening dusk from the two speakers on the outside, whose hushed tones showed extreme agitation.

"Why not?" repeated the first voice, with another laugh, the bitterness of which quickly melted into a half-sob. "That's the regulation thing, you know—first the engagement-ring, then the wedding-ring, then—I don't know what, except the workhouse."

"Don't you care how you hurt him?"

"Care?" There was a cadence in this quite indescribable. "What am I doing this for? What did I write that story for? Why, I'd sing in the streets for him; I'd take in washing; I'd—oh, Betty, you're young and don't understand loving! Here, take the muff, dear, and warm your poor little hands, while I run across the street and do the deed. After all, like dying, it's over in a moment."

"Isabel Allardyce, as I'm a sinner!"

For a moment the Editor stood dazed, watching the slim figure in the shabby, stylish silken skirts, which, to his limited masculine vision, had presented so brave an appearance, speeding across the street; then, without the faintest idea why he was doing it, he sped after her.

Was it his impetuous entrance, or the blast of air brought in with him, which sent a shudder through the girl with drooping head and scarlet cheek, who stood at the end of the counter talking to the bland, beady-eyed proprietor of the "loan office?" He could not tell, but at the first glimpse at the back of his head, which, with great presence of mind he had turned, she fled from the shop like a guilty thing, while the pawnbroker gazed after her in astonishment, only equal to that with which the Editor regarded himself in the big gilt-framed mirror.

How was he to account for his precipitous entrance?

"What can I do for you, sir?" said he of the golden balls carelessly, having summed up the somewhat seedy appearance of the editorial person.

Well, it had to be done sooner or later, and why appear like an idiot simply because you are one? The Editor lingeringly drew out his watch from his pocket.

"I want to pawn this?" he said.

As he left the shop a little piece of pink cardboard attracted his attention, and he stooped to pick it up. It was the pawn ticket which young Mrs. Allardyce had dropped in her hasty flight, and, in her ignorance of matters in which the Editor was thoroughly versed, had not valued enough to come back for it.

The next evening as the Editor, after having spent all his day in writing, save about nine hours and thirty minutes which he spent in meditation, slammed his shabby hat down on his head and prepared to depart. Diabolus looked at him from the glass and remarked:

"You're a fool."

"Give us some news, can't you?" asked the Editor.

"She's married," added Diabolus.

"I don't know why," said the Editor, with much moral severity, "the fact of a woman being married and a man being unmarried should make the aforesaid man unwilling to help the aforesaid woman out of a tight place. I'll grant you that it makes her less interesting, but it doesn't make her less hungry or hard up."

As he hurried along against a sharp whistling wind which cut like a knife, he could not keep from dwelling on the bare but tragic outlines of the story he had so unwittingly stumbled on. A loyal young wife, struggling against misfortune—she did not look poor any more than she looked like a wife, which only shows how seldom we can read between the lines of human documents—a husband either halt, maimed, blind, or shiftless—probably the latter—to whom she was so tenderly devoted, that she was ready to go any lengths to spare him the least pinch of poverty.

The Editor entertained cynical views concerning marriage, but a feeling of loneliness passed like a cold wave over the spot against which his gold watch no longer beat responsive, as he remembered the tone in which she had said:

"Care for him! I'd sing in the streets for him!" He half wished he was halt, maimed, blind, or shiftless, instead of able-bodied and independent, with a savage pride of poverty which had hitherto thrust all thoughts of woman's companionship or woman's tenderness behind it.

The house to which he had sent the "Christmas Saint" was just such a house people as the Allardyces might be expected to live in, a tall, gloomy, old, family mansion at the once fashionable end of Spruce Street, now crowded with lodging houses.

"Past, grand; present, dingy; future, squalid," observed the Editor, as he rang the bell, which was answered by the younger girl, who was plainly Mrs. Allardyce's sister.

"Can I see Mrs. Allardyce?" he asked.

Betty hesitated a moment before ushering him into the immense, cheerless parlour, with its general aspect of unheated vastness. Then she disappeared with his card.

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"It's the brute who sent back your story, Bell. Perhaps the Christmas feeling has thawed his heart and he's sorry."

A melancholy little laugh, like a ghost of the girlish gaiety it should represent, floated down the huge open fireplace to the Editor, and he tried to restrain his satisfaction in the old-fashioned architects, to whom a good draught was more sacred than a secret. I regret to say that he held his breath to hear the next sentence.

"If he'd bought that story you could keep the wedding ring, couldn't you?"

"Betty, be quiet! He'll hear you, and it will break his heart, as it's breaking mine. Oh, why did you start me crying when it's so important that I should look pretty?"

"Marriage," observed Diabolus to the Editor. "may make a woman less interesting, but not less coquettish."

Nevertheless, when brought face to face with Mrs. Allardyce, who was very pink, pretty, and excited, the Editor found himself in a quandary as to an explanation of his change of heart with regard to "The Christmas Saint."

"Heavens, I wish my tongue was the pen of a ready liar, as David says, or something like it. Fact is, Mrs. Allardyce," he said aloud, "that story was returned by—by my assistant before I knew anything about it."

"Oh, so you've an assistant, have you? I didn't see him when I was there."

"Well, he was somewhere about," said the Editor.

"What's his name? He must be a severe critic, to send back my poor little tale in such haste."

"He is," said the Editor veraciously. "I call him Diabolus, though that isn't his real name."

He left the house minus £5 and plus "The Christmas Saint" and a number of mingled sensations!

Firstly, Mrs. Allardyce was very, very poor; secondly, she was not used to poverty; thirdly, she was pretty to an almost surprising degree. The first two facts were as patent as the last. Fourthly, Mr. Allardyce was ill, not shiftless, for, *apropos* of something, she had said, with a distant air. "Mr. Allardyce is a hopeless invalid."

The Editor remarked to Diabolus that the more ill Mr. Allardyce was, the better he was pleased, and that personage retorted:

"You're a beauty to pose as a Christmas Saint, aren't you?"

For a penance he spent the next day writing a story of married love and happiness, which bade tender defiance to even the dread fates of illness, sorrow, and poverty. A noble youth figured as the good angel of the piece, and he heroically resisted the temptation to make the illness carry off the husband, and the noble youth carry off the wife.

Diabolus jeered at the story, but the Editor sent it to a daily paper, and when Mrs. Allardyce came to the office that very day with a hesitating inquiry as to whether he could use a few short sketches, and he noted, with a start, that the wedding ring was absent from her left hand, he gulped back his breath and said, "Yes, she might leave them."

"Heaven be merciful to you," said Diabolus, after she was gone.

Nevertheless, virtue was not left in solitary self-reward in this case. The day before Christmas a cheque came to the Editor in return for his story, and he thought joyfully, first of his Christmas dinner, then of his creditors, then of something else, whereupon he rose and put on his hat, and Diabolus said:

"You're a fool."

"No," said the Editor.

That evening, as he sat somewhat moodily at his desk, too depressed even to light the gas, he heard the quick click of French heels on his stairs again. He rose and threw the door open for Mrs. Allardyce, who came in flushed and panting.

"I was afraid you'd be closed," she gasped "on account of Christmas Eve. And I wanted to leave those sketches I spoke of."

"I don't take any notice of Christmas Eve," said the Editor, morosely. "Christmas is a deception."

"You wouldn't think so if you'd had my experience. See this?" holding out a hand from which the diamond ring flashed again, "I had—ah—lost this, and never really expected to see it again. It was my mother's engagement ring, and I was afraid my father would notice it was gone——"

"Your—what?"

"My father. I think I've told you that my father was an invalid."

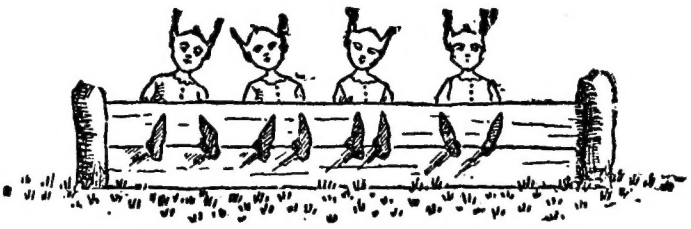
"Haven't you any husband at all?" almost shouted the Editor.

"One can live without a husband, I hope," said the young lady haughtily. "I didn't come here to be insulted, Mr. Hare."

"Please forgive me," said the Editor piteously, "I'm only insane. There's been a misunderstanding. that's all. Why I've been calling you Mrs. Allardyce all the time."

"I never noticed it," said Miss Allardyce. Then, observing his expression, she went on hurriedly: "As I said, the ring was my mother's—she gave it and her wedding ring to me when dying—and this afternoon's post brought it back to me, with never a word as to where it came from. Wasn't it lovely? I think it must have been sent me by a 'Christmas Saint.'"

"Some day," said the Editor dreamily "I hope to prove to you that there's no such person."



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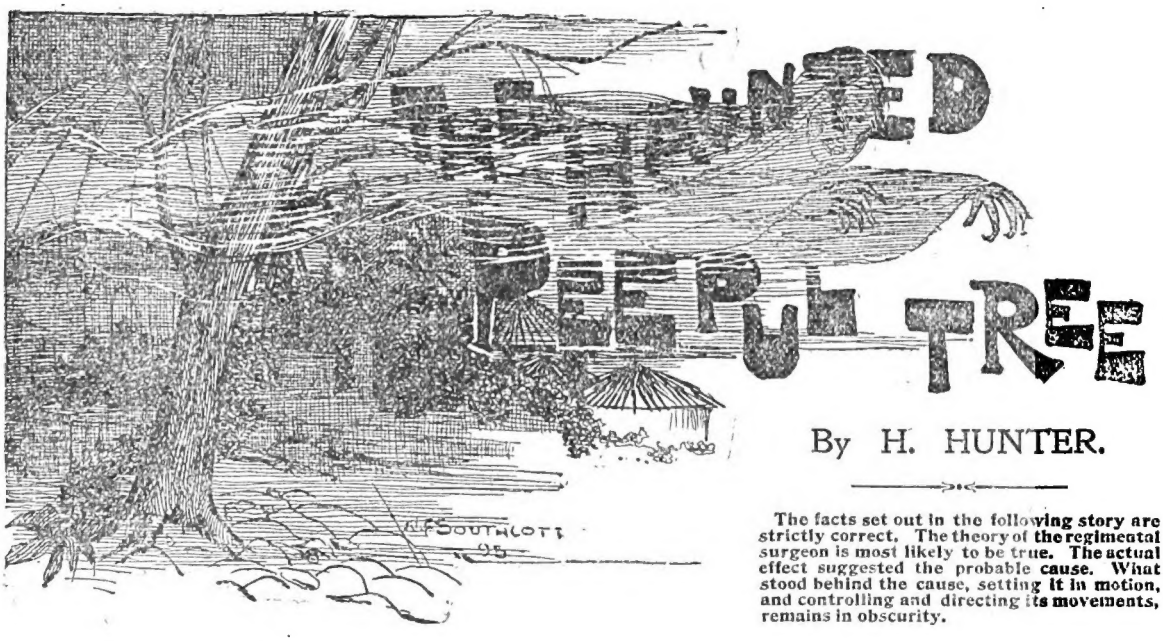

By H. HUNTER.

The facts set out in the following story are strictly correct. The theory of the regimental surgeon is most likely to be true. The actual effect suggested the probable cause. What stood behind the cause, setting it in motion, and controlling and directing its movements, remains in obscurity.

I.

A SKY of brass, a dusty road, and a score of palm-thatched huts huddled together under the friendly shade of a giant banyan. A stone's cast from the road a square brick building with a white domed roof, the tomb of some pious saint or worthy Hadji, fast falling into ruins, and now used by a utilitarian Government as a police post.

Within arm's length almost, of the ancient tomb, a tall peepul tree, and under the peepul tree three figures —two white faces stooping over a black one. A short distance away, and between the tree and the tomb, three other figures with dark faces, motionless, impassive, silently looking on.

All six figures are clad in the uniform of the Hon. East India Company but the white faces are protected from the deadly shafts of the fiery sun by the immense solar toupées worn by the Englishmen. The heat-haze lay over all, a thick, yellowish glare rendered nearly opaque by the dust-cloud which filled the air, obscuring the landscape for the time as effectually as the mixture of sulphur, soot, and moisture which darkens the atmosphere of London in November.

In the cluster of bamboo huts beyond the north wall of the tomb, there was neither sound nor movement. The stillness of death lay over them. Even the village mongrels had ceased to bark, and lain down to forget in the blessed effacement of sleep, the blows and oaths which were their waking portion. There was nothing moving on the broad bosom of the visible earth. The great globe seemed to have been suddenly emptied of life, to have gone suddenly silent, to have been converted into a gigantic funeral pyre, and to be covered with a vast yellow pall which enveloped all things in its stifling embrace.

Presently one of the stooping figures shifts its position, bringing life and motion into the picture, and lending human interest to the scene. Then both rise together, and stand looking down dubiously at the black figure lying there between them on the ground.

"Can't half make it out, Doctor, can you?" says one.

"Can't make it out at all, my boy," says the other. "The man had no excuse for dying, has no business to be dead, ought really to be as much alive at this very moment as you and me. It's the most confoundedly puzzling professional problem that I've ever been called upon to consider. Jumal Khan has not only defrauded the Company of the valuable services of an able-bodied sepoy, but, by choosing such a very inopportune moment, has practically deserted his post with arms in his hands."

"He was found dead by the *havildar* this morning, Doctor, when that officer went round to relieve guard."

"That's the 'head and front of his offending,'" said the Doctor. "The man had no business to do it. He had no valid excuse for leaving the service in such an abrupt and irregular fashion. It's a bad example to set the others."

The other man shrugged his shoulders, and the Doctor bent again over the prostrate form of Jumal Khan. He was dissatisfied with the negative results of his hasty examination. Lifting first one eyelid and then another, he looked long and questioningly into the sightless orbs of the dead sepoy. Whatever clue he may have hoped to find there failed to reward him, for he rose with a half-mortified expression on his face and a muttered exclamation on his lips.

"Nothing," he said, as he drew back a pace, "nothing whatever to account for it." Then, turning to his companion, Lieutenant Ash: "The man's dead," he said, "and that's all I can say about it."

"Then I'd better give orders for the burial," said the Lieutenant.

"In the name of Allah, the all-merciful," rejoined the surgeon, "Jumal was a son of the Prophet," and he pointed to the beads which appeared in a fold of the dead man's girdle.

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"The body's been lying here since daybreak," continued the Lieutenant. "The men wouldn't touch it till they sent for me, and I had to send for you. Fortunately the branches of the peepul have screened it from the sun."

The Englishmen walked slowly towards the white domed building, which was the most conspicuous feature in the dreary landscape, followed at a respectful distance by the three dark figures who had been silently watching the proceedings of the sahibs.

"*Ajáib!* God is great!" piously ejaculated Ismail Jemadar, on hearing from the mouth of the white men's physician—otherwise Edward Martin, regimental surgeon to the First Battalion of the Bengal Fusiliers—the plain, blunt story that Sepoy Jumal Khan had died for no reason at all that medical science could discover.

"'By visitation of God,' we'll call it this time," said the surgeon, adding, however, that it would probably be as well for the Jemadar not to lose too many of his men in a manner that was not recognised by the official authority at Agra.

"It won't help your promotion, Jemadar," interjected Lieutenant Ash. "The colonel-sahib will not be best pleased with the report I shall have to make him."

Ismail Jemadar salaamed till his forehead touched the ground.

"The will of Allah be done!" he murmured with pious fervour. "God is great—there is none greater. Let not man seek to contend with the Infinite!"

He was found dead

"Unexceptional sentiments," said the Doctor as they got into the buggy in which they had driven out from Agra. "The abstract wisdom of these people, my boy, approaches the sublime; but their practical intelligence is, unfortunately, somewhat defective. The key that will probably unlock the mystery of your man's decease, Bertie, is most likely to be found—there."

As he spoke the surgeon pointed across to the silent collection of bamboo huts looming out indistinctly through the shimmering yellow mist.

"Whew! ain't it hot!" exclaimed the youthful lieutenant, for whom personal questions had a more abiding interest than Asiatic mysteries.

II.

Six a.m. The yellow light of an Indian morning was streaming through the bamboo chinks. The English mail was to leave at sunset, and Edward Martin, M.D., was seated at his writing-table reading over the draft report of a "curious case" which he was communicating to a medical journal in London.

". . . The men were sepoys," ran the Doctor's statement, "stationed temporarily at a police post a few miles outside Agra. They were found dead under circumstances of such a singular character that, believing the story will be perused with interest by a large circle of your subscribers, I am sending you a full account of the incident, perhaps the most extraordinary which I have met with in the course of a long professional experience, together with a detailed report of the pathological examination of the second victim.

"Both men would seem to have died in a similar manner, and from a like predisposing cause, each of the bodies presenting precisely the same appearance to casual observation. Whether there were really any points of difference between the two I am unable to say, as that of the first victim only underwent an ordinary examination.

"In the second case the body was subjected to *strict* examination. Nothing was discovered, however, that would differentiate the one from the other, or that could be legitimately assigned as the actual cause of death.

"In each case the man was on sentry duty, his beat terminating at a peepul tree about thirty yards from the guard-house; and also, in each case, the body has been found beneath this tree, under which, as I have learnt, the sentry was instructed to remain for at least one minute before resuming his march. Death occurred between midnight and daybreak.

"The post is in charge of a native subaltern, who is visited daily by an officer from Agra. It has only been occupied since the 10th inst.—that is, for little more than a fortnight, yet in that time there have been two men reported dead under circumstances which up to date of writing have baffled all attempts to find a satisfactory explanation.

"There is a village close by, and I am——"

At this point the reading was interrupted by a sharp peremptory rap at the Doctor's door, followed immediately by the inquiry: "You there, Doctor?" in the excited tones of a man in a hurry.

"Come in, Colonel, come in!" cried the medico, who had recognised in a moment the owner of the voice.

"I say, Martin," burst out the Colonel, sweeping up

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to the table like a south-west monsoon, "this is a pretty state of things! Ash has just been in to report another man dead at Pali."

"You don't mean that?" said the surgeon, regarding the Colonel keenly. "I'm just sending off——"

"For goodness sake, Doctor," exclaimed the commanding officer, glancing suspiciously at the sheets of blue letter paper on the Doctor's table, "don't send off anything! Do nothing that will bring the Calcutta people down upon us before we're ready for them. We shall have a waggon load of papers sent in for us to fill up over this job; but we don't want them here till we've got a firm back to the story. Ash has brought in a tale which certainly supports your theory."

"I must go over at once," said the Doctor, jumping up quickly and throwing aside the sheets on which he had been engaged. He didn't stop to explain that his report was written for a newspaper in London, and not for the Army Medical Department at Calcutta. He thought that he might, probably, have something to add to it before it went.

"Everything, as I told you, Colonel," he went on, opening a drawer in his desk, and taking therefrom some diminutive object which he slipped into his pocket, "depends on my seeing the body as soon after death as possible. The suspicions I entertained in the first case were strengthened in the second; and the opinion I was inclined to was confirmed by a conversation I had subsequently with the *Chowkidar* (village watchman). But before committing myself to a definite statement I must find what I've been looking for, and unless I can see the body before *rigor mortis* has set in, all mere theorising is a waste of labour."

They were outside by this time. At the door the Colonel's buggy, with the champion trotter of the district between the shafts, was waiting for them.

"Good of you, Colonel," said the Doctor, throwing a look full of gratitude at his companion, "Dewdrop will take us there in twenty minutes."

"I'll back her to do the distance—over three miles, isn't it?—inside of fifteen. We ought to be there by six-thirty. How'll that do?"

"Not a moment too soon, but a lot better than half-past eight, which was the time of arriving on the last occasion," replied the Doctor, as the Colonel gathered up the reins and the mare went away. "I left instructions with the Jemadar on that occasion that if this thing happened again, he was to send in a man to report immediately. I suppose he wouldn't get in till after five?"

"Ash brought him round to my place at five-twenty; so the fellow hadn't lost much time. But I'd gone over to see Cotton, where Ash found me. The men it seems are all scared out of their wits—just quaking with fear. If they had white faces instead of black, I should call it funk. The tree's haunted by a vampire, is the pretty story my lieutenant's got hold of, and the men are in mortal terror. He has a notion the villagers would like to see the post removed."

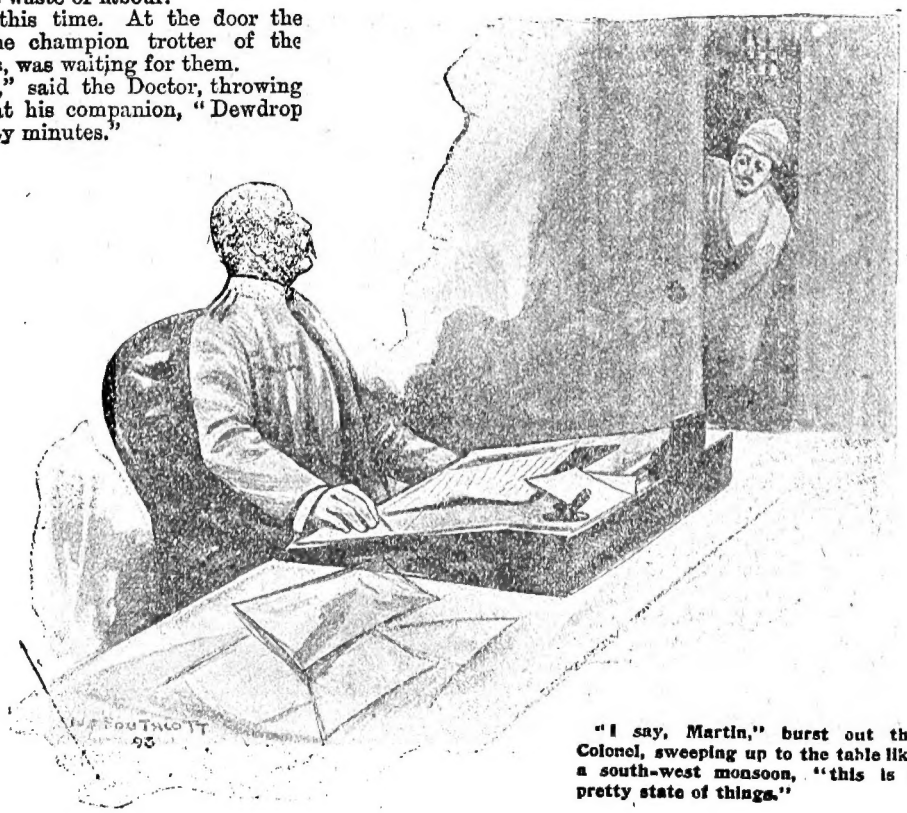
"The tree's got an evil reputation undoubtedly," said the Doctor, "that much I gathered from the talk I had with the *Chowkidar*; but a vampire, Colonel?—no, there's no vampire in this story, thank you. Vampires suck blood, and no blood had been taken from either of the bodies which I saw. I don't think the villagers care a *pice* whether the men stay or go. They're a quiet, inoffensive lot, whose only desire is to be let alone. They've no grudge against the police that I can discover; but they seem impressed with the belief that there's something uncanny about the peepul tree."

"You don't think they've put the story about?"

"No, I think the story, whatever it is, belongs to the tree, has grown up with it or, round it, and has become part of its history. I don't think the villagers have either invented it or circulated it. My bearer, who's been doing a little ferreting there on my account, tells me they won't speak about the tree until asked, and always avoid going near it themselves after dark. Certainly I had to use all my persuasive powers and rub a little oil on his palm before I could get Gitan the old *Chowkidar* to open his mouth; and then he didn't tell half a tale——hardly that."

"Hindoos aren't they?" queried the Colonel.

"Yes," from the Doctor.



"I say, Martin," burst out the Colonel, sweeping up to the table like a south-west monsoon, "this is a pretty state of things."

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"And our fellows are all sons of the Prophet. Ash was saying he thought the Malgoozar (headman) was perhaps scandalised at our turning the tomb into a guard-house. But the tomb's Mahomedan; so that can't apply. Hindoo prejudice is in no way offended by the occupation."

"Lieutenant Ash is no doubt a very zealous young officer, Colonel; but his knowledge of the country will improve on further acquaintance. What the Malgoozar probably said, was that the Hadji's tomb was built on the site of an old Hindoo temple sacred to Kali. That much I got from the watchman."

The Colonel pointed with his whip to a number of black specks in the sapphire sky. They were vultures hastening to an expected feast.

"Early birds," he murmured.

"Yes," assented the Doctor. "Wheresoever the body is there will the eagles be gathered together. Yonder's our goal, Colonel."

III.

Again, there were two white faces bending eagerly over a black one.

It was the third time that scene had been enacted under the high branches of the tall peepul tree. Again, there was a little group of silent watchers standing a short distance away—afraid to come nearer, afraid of touching that dumb, inanimate object, which a few hours before had been a man in the full enjoyment of lusty life.

"Do you see anything, Doctor?" asked the Colonel impatiently. The Doctor had been searching the dead man's eyes for several minutes with a powerful pocket

The Colonel gathered up the reins, and the mare went away.

lens. He did not at once answer the question. His whole attention was absorbed by the nature of his occupation. It was proving intensely interesting.

"What is it you see, Martin?" broke out the Colonel, noting the strange look on the Doctor's face, and growing more excited as the examination proceeded.

But the surgeon paid no heed to the Colonel's interrogations, and the examinations became prolonged.

"Got it!" exclaimed the Doctor at last, in the tone in which a man announces his success at a shooting match.

In his excitement, the Colonel could not refrain from laying his hand on the Doctor's arm. "Yes! What——?"

"H'm," murmured the medico.

"I'm afraid————ssh! *gone!!*" he cried savagely, glaring angrily at the Colonel.

"What——what is it?" stuttered the innocent offender.

It took Edward Martin, M.D., full five minutes to recover his temper.

"We can do no good by staying with this any longer," he said presently, moving off. "I've not got all I wanted, Colonel; but I've got all I'm ever likely to get—enough to enable me to put on record a definite opinion; more, I expect, than I can hope to make clear to the lay mind. But before saying anything I want first to go down to the village and have a bit o' talk with the *Chow-kidar* and the *Malgoozar*."

The Colonel stumped along by the Doctor's side, mute and mortified. He felt that somehow he had put his foot in it, and that silence best became his dignity. This was a doctor's matter. Responsibility lay with Martin. It was for him then, to take the initiative. It was a question of pathology or psychology, or some other "ology" that sounded equally well, but had no connection with regimental routine or military duty. When the M.D. made his report would be the time for the Colonel to take over the business and decide upon his duty to the Company.

The interview with the village officials proved an interminable business.

The men were evidently afraid of speaking—afraid of saying anything which they thought the sahibs would not like to hear—afraid of bringing down upon themselves the malignant power which they believed resided in the peepul tree.

Reduced by the Doctor to the lowest intelligible minimum, their contribution to the story went no further than this. A temple dedicated to Kali had formerly stood on the site of the Hadji's tomb—long ages ago it seemed, since its existence has been a tradition for generations. After the demolition of the temple—there was a choice variety of versions of this story to choose from—the idol was removed to the grove; and was set up according to the village chronicles, under the peepul tree which had been unluckily fixed upon as the boundary of the sepoy sentry's beat.

About the time of the birth of the present *Chowkidar*—that is to say some sixty years back—the image was carried off to Gola by a high priest of Kali who came from Benares. This worthy it would seem cursed with the curse of Kali, all and sundry who should hereafter defile the place where the holy altar had been set up and the sacred mysteries performed.

It was a fact known to all the village that men who had had the temerity to sleep under the peepul tree in the daytime had been smitten with leprosy or the black plague. Men who had lain down to rest there at night had been found dead in the morning.

The Malgoozar knew what would happen when he saw the sentry under the tree; and he couldn't understand how it was that Kali had not claimed a victim every night instead of only every week. He was afraid to speak, because he knew the sahibs did not worship the old gods and he feared their anger.

A demon lived in the tree, who was a servant of

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Mahadeva the destroyer, and it was not safe for any man to rest under its shadow. This was the native story.

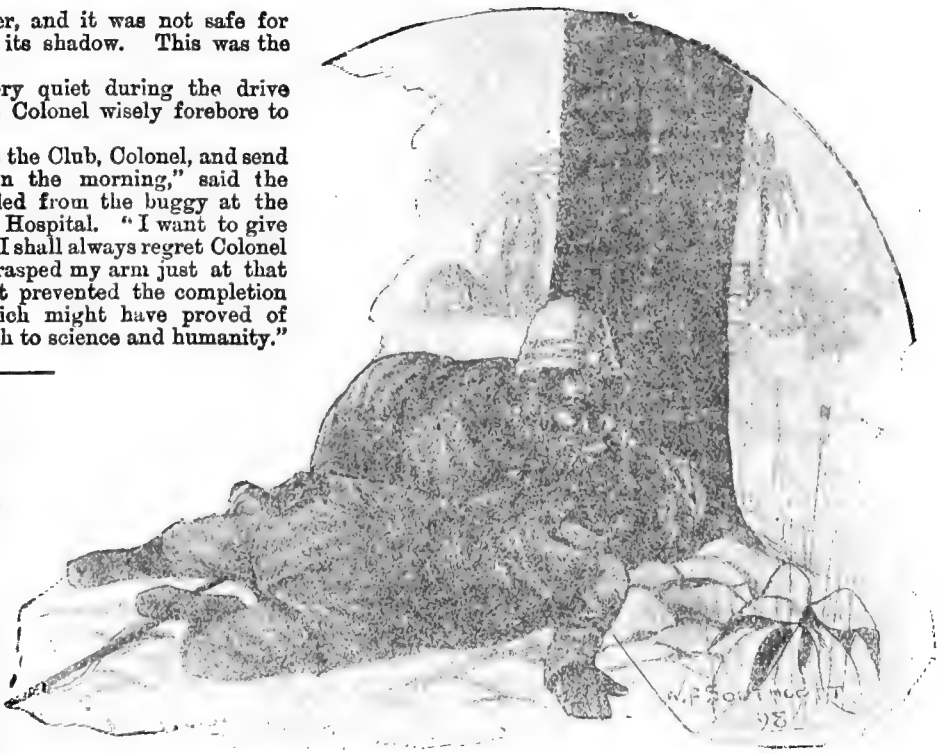
The Doctor was very quiet during the drive back to Agra, and the Colonel wisely forebore to ask questions.

"See you to-night at the Club, Colonel, and send in my official report in the morning," said the surgeon as he descended from the buggy at the doors of the European Hospital. "I want to give my nerves a rest. But I shall always regret Colonel that you should have grasped my arm just at that particular moment. It prevented the completion of an observation which might have proved of incalculable benefit both to science and humanity."

IV.

"THEN you think the man actually saw something?"

Doctor Martin had been addressing a select audience of three in the smoking-room of the English Club—three intensely interested listeners; the Colonel of the Sepoy regiment, the Adjutant, and Lieutenant Ash who commanded the detachment in temporary charge of the Police Post. It was the Adjutant who had asked the question.



Searching the dead man's eyes with a powerful pocket lens

"I am *certain* that he saw something," replied the surgeon. "Death in each instance was the result of fright. I suspected it in the first case. I detected what I thought were unmistakable signs in the second. But in the case of Azim Khan, not only were the signs clear and palpable, the terror being plainly manifest in the eyes four hours after death; but on each retina there was an *impression*, not very distinct, but obvious enough to a trained observer using a powerful glass.

"An impression of what? I had been carefully scrutinising the eyes, looking for it, before I caught it. It was stronger in the right eye than in the left, where it only appeared as a dark blurr without definite shape and was fading fast. On the retina of the right eye, however, the outline of one half of what may perhaps have been a head could faintly be traced; but the lower part was hidden by a limb which had been thrust before it—a limb which undoubtedly ended in claws, only three of which I had been able to make out, when the Colonel, without knowledge of the consequence, suddenly seized hold of my arm. The focus was thereby lost. I had been at great pains to find it, and before it could be recovered the impression had faded so far as to be useless.

"The jemadar, as you are aware, Colonel, has spoken to having seen the branches of the peepul agitated in the daytime, when there was not a breath stirring to account for the movement. They have been pushed aside, he says, as if to admit the passage of some animal through them, and have then sprung back again. But he never saw anything. Of course, Colonel, you cannot take account of village tales and native superstitions; but neither can you go on losing men in this way every week. Whatever the latent cause, the men die from active fright. That much is certain—as it is that, the peepul tree is a connecting link between the cause and the effect. Cut down the tree——" "and double the guard," put in the Adjutant.

"Good, sound, practical advice," said the Colonel, relieved at finding himself breathing the air of common sense, after inhaling so much mystery.

* * * * *

Before another forty-eight hours had gone by, the peepul tree was level with the ground. Lieutenant Ash had posted two men on guard, and was himself on duty at the tomb.

A week passed, and then a month. At the end of that time the guard was reduced.

The story of the haunted peepul tree had become almost as legendary as the tradition of the temple of Kali and the demon of Mahadeva.

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THE GOVERNOR'S NIECE.

A Story of West Africa.

By GERTRUDE PAGE.

Author of "Flat F. and Flat G.," "For a Woman's Kiss," etc.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

Nessie Powell stood in the window of her aunt's drawing-room and looked across Hyde Park. She stood with her hands behind her, and her brow was puckered, and her eyes wore a far away expression; it was evident she noted nothing of the panorama passing before her.

Her aunt sat working at a little distance, and now and then she raised her eyes and glanced at the slim figure in the window. She was the wife of the Governor of Accra, and had been trying to persuade her niece to accompany her to the coast, to stay a month and then return with him when he came home on leave.

Nessie was a little afraid of the sea and hesitated.

"You will like it after the first few days," said Lady Mannering presently, "and it will do you so much good. You have been looking very poorly lately."

Nessie did not reply but went on weighing the question.

She was thinking how delightful it would be, when once there, to have broken away from certain old associations and memories, and perhaps make a fresh start without that perpetual longing at her heart.

Three months ago, Dick Pontin of the Lagos Secretariat, had concluded his leave in England and gone back to the coast; at the beginning of his holiday he had seen a great deal of Nessie, and they had soon become special friends, and then suddenly he had studiously avoided her. It had come like a shock, for she could not explain the change; she only knew that the season had lost all its charm for her, and the gaieties become mockery.

Two months afterwards she was told that he was engaged and her heart was very sore. She tried at first to be hard about it and persuade herself that she didn't care. She said he was evidently very fickle and not worth fretting about. She told herself she had had a fortunate escape.

But all the same she could not forget his steady grey eyes and manly bearing, which emphatically gave the lie to her charge of fickleness, and so she decided she had imagined too much and he had in reality been only just friendly with her.

She then faced her trouble bravely and prepared to make herself forget, but it was hard work and other things than late hours took the roses from her cheeks and the lightness from her step. Had there been any fear of meeting him on the coast, she would have declined at once, but she knew there was not the smallest likelihood of it, as Lagos was a long way from Accra, and he would not be returning home for some months.

So at last she turned her back to the window and came into the room.

"I think I'll go, auntie," she said simply.

Lady Mannering looked up with a pleased expression.

"That's right," she said. "You'll be certain to enjoy yourself when you've got the sea-sickness over," and she rose and put aside her work, saying she would begin to make arrangements at once, and must write some letters.

She was a tall, stately woman, with splendid dark eyes and massive coils of thick dark hair, but her mouth was hard, and one felt that she would be a difficult woman to withstand, if she made up her mind about anything. Without exactly letting it be apparent, she always had her own way, and what she attempted she usually achieved.

Nessie Powell was her favourite niece, and she liked her none the less because she was one of the few who dare occasionally go against her. At the same time she practically ruled the girl, but was careful never to let her know of it. Of Dick Pontin she had disapproved from the first, on account of his prospects, and in many little ways she had contrived to come between them. When she heard casually that he was engaged, she lost no time in telling the news to Nessie. Her idea now, was to marry her niece to her friend Captain Welbeck; and being a woman with nothing particular to do, she was not above scheming to carry out her plan.

Captain Welbeck had told her he was starting for West Africa shortly, and as she had long talked of going herself, she decided to do so now and take Nessie Powell with her. She felt the change of life and scene would do the girl good, and help her to get over her disappointment quickly, and she saw no harm in quietly ascertaining Captain Welbeck's ship and taking their passages in the same.

They arrived at Liverpool over night as the boat started early, and stayed at a hotel. In the morning,

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as Nessie was ready first, she stood by the large fire in the hall, warming her feet and amusing herself by watching the various people bustling about.

Presently a tall man, with a grey moustache and military bearing, came and stood by the fire also and Nessie coloured slightly, as she became aware that he was quietly scrutinising her from head to foot. At last she turned her head and looked straight into his eyes with a quick, fearless, half-defiant glance. He returned it a moment, then looked quietly away, but did not offer to move.

Nessie was just about to go, when her aunt came into the hall, and instantly advanced with outstretched hand and a surprised face towards them.

"How do you do, Captain Welbeck?" she exclaimed. "How strange that we should meet you here. Let me introduce you to my niece," and she turned to Nessie.

"I know Miss Powell very well by sight," he replied, with a gravely polite bow, "and I am delighted to make her acquaintance, though I wish it had been any time but the present."

Nessie looked slightly amused while her aunt remarked. "Why, how is that?"

He was quietly scrutinising her from head to foot.

"Because I am just embarking for West Africa, and I shall not be able to make use of my introductions for six months."

"Africa," exclaimed Lady Mannering, "surely not in the *Roquelle*?"

"That is my ship, why——surely——" and his eyes suddenly lit up, though his face remained unmoved, "surely you are not going out?" he concluded.

"Yes, we are going to my husband for a few weeks," said Lady Mannering.

"Then I am indeed fortunate," and he looked hard at Nessie.

Nessie looked away hurriedly, for something in his glance made her shiver a little, and she felt sure she should not like him.

But when, after five miserable days below deck, she made her appearance looking white and wretched, he proved so considerate and sympathetic, that her sudden aversion vanished somewhat. He placed a deck chair for her in a shaded nook and then, for over an hour, entertained her with anecdotes and adventures, while her aunt read a little way off.

And Nessie listened gladly, for she had been hopelessly wretched below deck, and was glad of anything that took her thoughts from herself.

By evening she had cheered up wonderfully, and Lady Mannering looked on contentedly while they paced the deck together, and admired the beautiful hues of the setting sun.

"I will show you my photographs to-morrow," he said to her as they were saying "good-night." "I want your opinion upon some of them."

Nessie laughed a little uneasily, "I don't know anything about photographs," she said.

"I think you will know sufficient to make your opinion valuable to me," he replied rather pointedly, looking hard at her; and again she was conscious of that little shivery feeling.

At the beginning of the third and last week of the journey, it was generally recognised among the few passengers on the ship, that Captain Welbeck's attentions to Miss Powell were not only marked, but genuine, and they waited with idle curiosity for the final move.

Nessie began to realise it also, and she began to feel too that somehow she was in his power. His manner to her had a certain air of possession about it, and a marked assurance. Sometimes when she was off-hand with him, she saw him set his lips tightly, while a gleam of determination shone in his eyes, and without exactly feeling afraid of him, she felt helpless to resist him. She felt that, if their wills clashed, hers would go down before his like a leaf.

And being a healthy, independent English girl, she resented the feeling strongly and made strenuous efforts to break away from his influence. Again and again she almost succeeded, and again and again she was reconquered.

Meanwhile Lady Mannering made no mention of the subject. While Captain Welbeck monopolised Nessie, she would pace the deck with her usual stately air and converse on the many subjects of which she was a complete master, with such of the passengers as happened to please her. Apparently she was quite unconscious of what was going on, and never appeared to throw them in each other's way. It was two days before they reached Accra that the climax came.

Nessie was standing looking idly across the blue waste of waters, and there was a shadow in her clear

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'No, no . . . it cannot be."

eyes, and a little droop about her mouth. She had resolutely put her sorrow away and as resolutely strove to forget it. She had buried it deep down in her heart and tried to trample its grave out of sight, but sometimes, as with all our hidden graves, the buried past rose up and shut the sunlight from the present. Nessie looked across the blue waters with steady eyes but a weight like lead pressed down on her, and a dreary sense of loneliness.

"You look thoughtful, Miss Powell," said a well-known voice to her.

She smiled slowly but did not turn. Instead she leant her arms on the rail and looked down into the water.

"I believe I was dreaming," she said simply.

He leant beside her and his arm touched hers. A nervous sensation passed over her, but she felt as if she could not move.

And presently she found herself gazing steadily down into the water, while he told her in measured tones of his love, and asked her to be his wife. When he ceased speaking they were both silent for some moments, then she looked up suddenly.

"No, no," she said hurriedly, as if afraid of herself "it cannot be, I don't love you."

She was conscious that his lips tightened and his brow lowered a little, but he only said quietly. "Perhaps you have not thought it over fairly. I can offer you every advantage in the way of money and position, and I am sincerely in love with you. I was first attracted to you at Lady Nevill's ball three months ago, but could not get an introduction to you. Will you do me the honour to consider what I have told you?"

"I feel sure it is unnecessary," she stammered, changing colour. "I do not think I am likely to change my mind."

"At any rate I may speak to you again, mayn't I? Let me take your answer to-morrow instead of this evening."

She glanced towards him and the pain in her heart gripped her.

He was strong and manly and kind, and she—she was tired and lonely, for the sweetness had gone out of everything, and she had not lived long enough to know how soon the sun would shine brightly again.

She thought it would be nice to be taken care of and not feel so lonely, and then that old sense of helplessness came over her again.

"Shall we leave it till to-morrow?" he reiterated; and she assented.

The next morning her aunt alluded to the subject for the first time, and seeing her niece's indecision, brought all her influence to bear on her. In a careful, collected way she talked down all her scruples and virtually settled the question for her.

When the *Roquelle* reached Accra the following day, Nessie was formally engaged to Captain Welbeck.

He was going on to Lagos, but had time to go ashore with them in the surf boat. His care and consideration for Nessie were unbounded, but all the time she was conscious of his iron determination and a little afraid of him. She did not feel free to speak and act as she liked, and the restraint rather fretted her. Still, his manner was kindness itself, so she laughed down her fears, and before he left them, he persuaded her, with Lady Mannering's help, to be married at Accra in six weeks' time, and remain on the coast with him until he returned to England.

Later on in the evening, Nessie stood on the verandah of the Governor's castle alone, and looked thoughtfully into the glorious African night. The castle was built close on to the sea, and the moonlight on the waters and on the palm trees and bananas ma e a beautiful, half-mystical scene. Now and then the stillness was broken by the noise of the tom-toms and uncouth singing, or by the laughter of a merry band of young Englishmen, returning to their quarters after an evening's jollity; but otherwise silence and peacefulness reigned.

Lady Mannering was engaged with her husband and one or two friends of his, and Nessie had been glad to have the opportunity of slipping away unnoticed.

Suddenly a quick footstep sounded on the verandah, hesitated a moment, then hurried towards her.

"Miss Powell," said a voice eagerly, and all the colour went out of Nessie's face, while the landscape became an indistinct blur.

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She turned slowly and stood face to face with Dick Pontin.

"I'm so awfully glad to see you," he continued in the same eager voice. "How are you? I had to go up country or I should have been here to receive you, as I have been staying at the castle lately. I have only just returned and had to fly into my dress clothes, for fear you would have gone to bed. How are you? You look cold. Shall I fetch you a wrap?"

"Thanks, I'm not at all cold," she replied, but she shivered and went if possible whiter, "I'm very pleased to see you."

"You look as if you had seen a ghost," he laughed. "Did I startle you?"

With a tremendous effort Nessie drew herself together.

"You certainly surprised me," she said with an attempt at lightness. "I had no idea you were in Accra."

"Didn't you know I had been promoted?" he asked with a gleam in his eyes, "I have got poor Nevill's berth. He died of fever you know, two months ago, and through your uncle's influence I took his place. I have been acting as secretary to your uncle for a week, as Hedley has fever, and that is why I am staying here, but I am afraid I go to-morrow.

"I hope we shall see a great deal of each other. I could hardly believe my ears when he told me you were coming out with Lady Mannering."

Nessie turned away. She had an odd feeling that if she didn't scream out or something, her head would burst. Instead she gripped the verandah rail until her knuckles stood out.

He noticed her constrained manner, and set it down to his sudden breaking off of their friendship in Eng'and.

"Did you have a good passage?" he asked, determined not to be repulsed, but to make the most of his opportunity. He had thought of little else but seeing her again, since he got his promotion. It had not occurred to him that his conduct in London could cause an actual breach between them. It was all so clear to him, that he imagined it was to her also. He did not know much about girls, having had little to do with them. He was so conscious of his own love for her, that he supposed she knew about it too, and would understand why he had acted as he had. He had never ceased loving her for a moment since he set eyes on her; there did not seem to him to be any need for preliminaries, or any reason why they should not go on just where they left off, with the only difference that he was now in a position to show his love.

"Yes very good," she replied to his question, without meeting his eyes. "I enjoyed it very much when I got over the sea-sickness."

"What do you think of Accra?" and he leant against a pillar beside her, taking in every line of her face and form with ill-concealed eagerness.

"I think it is interesting," she replied. "I am looking forward to exploring the neighbourhood. I suppose it is perfectly safe to go about alone?"

"Oh yes, but you might get lost and find it difficult to make yourself understood. I am not very busy just now, if you will allow me to be your escort sometimes, I should be only too glad."

Nessie bit her lips.

"Thank you," she replied constrainedly, "but I daresay my uncle will arrange for Lady Mannering and me to be shown round."

He looked surprised and pained, and for a few moments they were both silent. Her changed manner puzzled him, but being very straight by nature, he decided to come to the point at once, and not risk a misunderstanding.

"I hope you are not vexed with me about anything, Miss Powell," he began, standing upright beside her. "I know I may have seemed to behave rather strangely in London last spring, but I couldn't help myself. If you only knew what it cost me! I had no position then worth speaking of, and no prospects. As it is, I owe my present good fortune to having been able to serve your uncle in an unlooked for way.

"I was obliged to run away from you, I couldn't trust myself, but now——"

"Oh, hush——" she gasped and clutched tighter at the rail.

It was Dick's turn to go white now as he asked anxiously. "What is it? What have I said?"

"Oh, nothing," and she laughed fitfully. "It only sounds rather odd. I was told you got engaged before you left England."

"I got engaged——" in incredulous tones.

"Yes, I heard it from one or two quarters."

"What rubbish," and he flushed and looked annoyed. "I should have thought *you* would have known better than to believe it," with emphasis.

"How should I?" she asked with an attempt at lightness. "I am rather sorry: I was going to congratulate you nicely."

She turned slowly and stood face to face with Dick Pontin.

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"Well, I'm glad it's not necessary," and he looked perplexed. "But it is a good thing you mentioned it. We shall understand each other better now. I am hoping we can have some of those jolly times again like we had in England. Do you remember Henley and the Jubilee and the Derby? What times they were; I have often lived them all through again out here," and his eyes shone, "I'd like to take you to see the new golf links if you'll come. Will you?"

"I don't know whether I can manage it. I must see what Lady Mannering says."

He looked at her anxiously.

"You are so different somehow," he said. "What is it? I have pictured this meeting over and over again, since I heard you were coming, and now——" he paused.

She was looking out to sea with straining eyes and set lips.

"What is it?" he asked, with boyish peremptoriness.

She turned and looked into his face, and her own was haggard in spite of her efforts.

"I am engaged," she said slowly, "and going to be married almost immediately."

II.

"WHAT on earth's the matter with Pontin?"

The speaker was lounging in a hammock chair on a verandah, with his feet on the top rail. As he spoke, he carelessly knocked the end off his cigar and shifted his position a little in the listless fashion of the coast.

"Goodness knows, but he's jolly dicky," replied his companion, who was lounging in much the same fashion, only with his feet on a table.

The first speaker, Captain Drew, took a long whiff at his cigar, blew the smoke into rings, and finally remarked questioningly:

"Think it's Miss Powell?"

"Don't see how it can be. She was engaged when she arrived. She must have made short work of him if it is. Lady Mannering informed me of the fact in about ten minutes, as if to warn me off."

"They may have met in England."

Before replying Captain Lascelles took a drink out of the glass beside him, and lit a fresh cigarette.

"Possibly," he said at last, "but I hardly think so. I've never seen him speak to her yet; they don't take the faintest notice of each other."

"That's just what looks queer," replied Captain Drew. "Why the deuce don't they?"

"Quarrelled, perhaps."

"Not they. Pontin's not the chap to quarrel. There isn't a better fellow on the coast. I hate to see him looking as he does. Last night in the middle of the evening I saw him go out on to the verandah by himself. They made him sing and recite, you know. Wouldn't let him off. And when he'd done sending them into fits of laughter, he just went outside alone, and leant against a pillar. It upset me, and that's saying a good deal. I can stand a fair amount naturally, after seeing one's pals go home and die, as they do in this beastly place; but I can't stand seeing a chap play the fool with the look in his eyes that Pontin has."

"Sure to be a girl at the bottom of it, poor devil," said Captain Lascelles philosophically.

"Then if it's a girl who can play any tricks on a chap like Pontin, all I can say is, she wants smothering." And Alec Drew got up and shook himself with an energy quite surprising.

Lascelles smoked on lazily.

"Miss Powell wouldn't," he said presently.

"Good afternoon, Miss Powell."

"No, I don't think she would," replied Drew. "She's one of the best, and that's just why it's so deuced odd, because I can't help thinking she's in it somehow."

Just then they heard the wheels of a go-cart, and a moment later Dick Pontin himself rode up to the bungalow steps.

"What ho!" called Drew, and advanced to meet him. "Glad to see you, old chap."

Pontin gave some directions to his boys, and went up the steps with outstretched hands.

"I'm off to-morrow," he said. "Thought I'd just come round and say a good-bye. Hullo, Lascelles, you here! Thought you'd got fever."

"Sorry to disappoint you, old chap. Come and have a cock-tail."

"Thanks; I'm agreeable," and, with a smile, Pontin planted himself on the rail of the verandah, and leant forward with his arms across his knees, while Drew succumbed once more to his lounge.

"Off to-morrow," he said, when settled to his liking; "what on earth do you mean?"

"I've got Mannering to send me up-country."

"What the dickens for?" put in Lascelles.

Pontin shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"A freak," he remarked. "I've persuaded him to let me join the party going up for a palaver with King Que."

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"Beastly work this time of the year. Rum idea to go just when there's a little life in the place. You'll miss Lady Mannering's ball."

"I'm not keen on dancing," and Pontin watched his cigar smoke carelessly.

"It'll be a swell affair," continued Lascelles. "A sort of formal announcement of Miss Powell's engagement, I hear. Welbeck himself is coming, and I believe they're going to be married a few days afterwards."

Both men watched Pontin narrowly, but he only went on gazing at his cigar end and made no sign.

"Nice girl," said Drew casually. "Too good for Welbeck. Can't stand the man."

"What's wrong with him?" and Pontin looked away from them and flicked a spider from the rail beside him.

"Starchy beggar. A German Emperor sort of a chap. He'll develop into a tyrant if she doesn't mind."

"Got the pull though," put in Lascelles. "The Griffin knew what she was about."

"Who do you mean by the Griffin?" asked Pontin.

"Lady Mannering, to be sure. She's got Miss Powell pretty well under her thumb, anyone can see. In fact, she appears to me to be disposed to boss the whole colony."

Dick swung one foot and said nothing.

"How long shall you be away?" asked Drew.

"Six weeks I should think."

"Then you'll miss the wedding."

"Yes."

"Not keen, eh?"

Dick laughed with an attempt at indifference which, however, did not go down with his friend. "Get quite enough funerals without weddings," he said.

"It makes a little variation," remarked Drew drily, and sat up to mix another cock-tail.

"When do you start?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"Well, don't leave your bones up there. You look pretty seedy."

"No, don't," put in Lascelles good humouredly, "because we can't work that Pierrot entertainment without you."

As Dick Pontin rode home again he met a girlish figure clad all in white, with a large white umbrella. He hesitated a moment, then called to the boys to stop, and alighted.

"Good afternoon, Miss Powell," he said rather gravely. "You are a little rash to be walking at this hour. Will you do me the favour of using my cart?"

"Thank you, but I am only returning home from Colonel Grant's, and it is such a little distance, I prefer to walk. Those things shake you to pieces," and she laughed nervously.

Again Dick hesitated, then said: "May I walk to the castle with you?"

Nessie Powell assented with a sickening feeling, for the strain of the last four weeks was beginning to unnerve her. Ever since that first night they had only met casually, and exchanged the bare civilities of conversation, but this was partly owing to Lady Mannering's vigilant eye. She had no sooner discovered Dick Pontin's presence than she had systematically monopolised Nessie's time. She talked incessantly of the approaching wedding, and would barely trust her out of her sight, while to Dick her manner was coldness itself.

By some mistake he was nearly always left out of the invitation list, and if he met Nessie at another house her aunt was certain to be near enough to prevent anything at all of a confidential conversation.

At first Dick was very indignant, but afterwards he thought it was probably Nessie's wish as well, so he avoided them altogether. But that afternoon, with the unavoidable perils of his up-country journey on his mind, and the consciousness that in all probability he would never see her again, he could not resist a few last words. So he sent the boys on with the cart and paced slowly by her side.

"I want to take this opportunity of offering you my good wishes for your happiness," he began in the same grave manner, "as I shall probably not see you again."

Nessie caught her breath, but remained outwardly calm and collected. "How is that?" she asked.

"I am going up country, and when I come back you will have gone from Accra."

"It is rather dangerous, isn't it?" she said, looking straight before her.

"Not if one is careful and takes proper precautions. Not that that would hinder me," he added with a sudden bitterness; "there are some times when one greets danger as a friend."

Nessie quickened her steps a little.

"I hope you won't run any risks," she said, striving to crush the anxiety from her voice and face.

He was silent.

"You ought to consider your people at home," she continued. "Your sister would almost break her heart if anything happened to you."

"Yes," he said at last, "I must consider Edith. No one else would care much, but I think she would."

"I should care," she said, then drew herself up short.

"Would you?" he asked pointedly, and looked into her face.

"Of course I should," and again she laughed nervously. "I cannot spare any of my friends."

"Is that all?" he asked, and his steady eyes seemed to look through into her soul.

She tried to meet them, but failed, and the words she would say died away upon her lips. He was watching her closely and saw it all.

"God help us both!" he ejaculated in a low voice, and stood still with his hands in his pockets, and gazed out to sea without seeing anything.

"Do you care for Welbeck at all?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, don't ask me any questions," she said pleadingly. "Don't you know? Can't you see? Let us say good-bye now and get it over. I have taken my path and I am obliged to follow it."

"Do you mean you haven't the courage to own yourself mistaken?"

"No, no, not that! Oh, can't you understand?"

"The only thing I can't understand," he said slowly, "is why you let them ride rough-shod over you and rush this thing through, unless you like it."

"I can't play him false," she breathed in a low voice, "at least you might understand that."

"I will try," he said gravely, and they went on in silence, and parted at the gates.

The day of the ball the whole of Accra was more or less in a state of excitement. Every Englishman in the colony had been invited, and all the leading natives. The latter were almost beside themselves, especially the ladies, for most of them had brand new costumes from England, which they had probably been keeping months for a function grand enough to grace them.

In spite of everything Nessie could not help laughing, after the guests began to arrive, at the incongruities of

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The ball went forward gaily, and merriment was the order of the hour.

some of the marvellous toilettes. The clothes themselves were all right, but their owners were apparently in a delightful state of ignorance concerning how they should be worn. One gaily-dressed belle wore a feather-boa round her waist, and another a jewelled waist-band round her neck. Several ladies wore two-buttoned kid gloves with short sleeves, while one had decorated her skirt with a chiffon opera cape, panier fashion. Nessie counted three bodices worn hind before, and two sisters came wearing each other's skirts.

Lady Mannering received them all with her usual stately mien, but a careful observer easily detected a shade of anxiety on her face, and she constantly glanced at the door as if watching for someone. The fact was, Captain Welbeck had not yet made his appearance, and she was utterly at a loss to account for it. The ship he was to come in had been signalled in the afternoon, and ought to have arrived by now, giving him ample time to dress, but the minutes ticked on and still there was no sign of him.

Meanwhile, the ball went forward gaily, and merriment was the order of the hour. The Englishmen appeared to be getting unlimited amusement out of their dusky partners, and the dusky partners themselves to be coquetting wildly.

In the middle of the evening Nessie stood apart with Captain Drew, and watched the animated scene. They were on a little balcony, commanding a glorious view of the coast from without and a bird's-eye view of the room from within. After watching the dancers for a little while she turned, and, leaning against a support, looked wistfully out through the night.

Captain Drew pulled a low chair forward and placed it so that she could see the moon on the sea, and then persuaded her to be seated. He thought she looked dreadfully white and ill, and, without quite knowing why, he felt very sorry for her.

Nessie on her part was quite content, for she knew he was Dick's great friend, and somehow with him she did not feel obliged to seem lively. So she sat quite still and looked over the sea, and he sat on a small table beside her, swinging his feet and humming to himself.

"May I smoke?" he asked, and she bent her head in assent.

"Rather odd Captain Welbeck should be so late," he remarked presently in his usual slow, careless fashion.

"Yes," she answered, "I can't understand it at all. I suppose the ship is in?"

"Yes, but she hasn't been in long. Perhaps he's had all his dress shirts stolen, and had to go round borrowing."

Nessie smiled slowly and leant her head back. She did not pretend to be very concerned. She felt too tired to pretend anything.

"I wonder how Pontin's getting on?" he continued presently. "I hope he won't go and be rash. He looked rather as if he might."

"How was that?"

"I don't know, but he hasn't seemed quite himself for the last month. He's down upon his luck about something. Awfully good chap Pontin. Not a lady's man, perhaps, but a trump to the backbone."

"You know him well?"

She carefully avoided meeting his eyes, and half turned her head away.

"Yes. We used to 'dig' together. I suppose as he knew your uncle when he came out here you have met him before?" and he watched her narrowly.

"Yes, I have met him at dances in London," she replied, still looking away.

"I can't help thinking he's awfully cut up about something," continued Captain Drew. "He looks it somehow. Do you think he is?"

"I haven't heard of anything;" but, as she spoke, a flush dyed her cheeks and then faded away, leaving her paler than ever.

"You have never heard his name mentioned in connection with anyone else's, perhaps?"

"I heard he got engaged when he was last in England, but I think it wasn't true after all."

Captain Drew smoked hard for several seconds, with knitted brows, then remarked slowly:

"No, it wasn't true, but it was dashed impudence of whoever started it. It might have caused serious mistakes."

Nessie lowered her eyes to her fan, and for some

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minutes he watched her in silence. Then he went on irrelevantly:

"Women are strange creatures. They're so insanely fond of making martyrs of themselves for a sentiment, or a sensation, or something equally foolish."

She smiled a little.

"You are growing quite philosophical," she said.

"I am a bit of a philosopher in my way," he said. "We all get a bit so on the coast. It's just as well, because we have to put up with a good deal, to say nothing of the amount of funerals we attend. I can't take women philosophically, though. They annoy me when they act with blind foolishness."

"You are rather hard on my poor sex."

"Well, I want to do them good, you see," and he smiled a little. "Now you, for instance, with all due deference, I could easily imagine you going to the stake for a religion or a fad."

"Go on," she said, looking amused.

"Well, of course it's very noble and splendid, and all that; but, at the same time, it's dashed silly."

"It's often the easiest, though."

"In that case then, I should call it want of pluck." And again he watched her narrowly.

She winced slightly, and turned away.

"Perhaps you don't understand," she said slowly. "Men rarely do. They jump to conclusions, and pass judgment on their own side of the question only," and she stood up as if to go.

"Perhaps not," he said, rising also. "It's a queer old world, and mistakes are so easily made and so hardly unmade."

Nessie bit her lips and took a step towards the window, but she was suddenly arrested by his exclaiming:

"Hullo—what's up?"

She looked round, and then they both leant over the balcony together and watched a little group below. A messenger appeared to have come with important news.

"Died of fever yesterday," they heard. "Have come to tell His Excellency."

Nessie gasped and clutched hard at the rail.

"It's Dick," she breathed, in a hoarse voice, going deathly white.

Captain Drew was startled himself, but he read her secret.

"Oh, no, not likely," he said soothingly, "I should think it's probably some news from the ship. I'll go down and see, shall I, and come back here? Sit down while I go," and he led her to the chair again. "Don't be anxious; I'm sure there's no need. It can't be Pontin."

When he returned he found her looking hard before her, with set lips, and she did not move as he approached.

"It is bad news," he said very quietly.

She drew a deep breath, and said mechanically:

"What is it?"

"Dick Pontin died of fever yesterday," he replied. Then he turned his back on her, and leant over the balcony, apparently deeply interested in the people below.

"Dick Pontin died of fever yesterday."

Mr. Jawsmith: "Mrs. J., I am going to buy a pair of scales and have them sent up here to-day."

Mrs. J: "Why on earth do you want scales?"

Mr. J: "I'm determined to have my own weigh in this house."

"Human nature is inherently pessimistic," remarked the man who assumes great wisdom.

"There isn't any proof of that assertion."

"Yes, there is. Nobody ever stops to talk about the weather except when it's disagreeable."

Jack (to his *fiancée*): "I think of getting a musical instrument, Maud. Say, perhaps, a cornet."

Maud (in dismay): "Oh, no; not that horrid thing."

Jack (in surprise): "And why not, dearest?"

Maud (blushing violently): "It makes the lips so hard."

Villainous-looking Character: "Wot's ther time, guvnor?"

Mr. Bluff (hitting him over the head): "It's just struck one."

Villainous-looking Character: "I 'ope your watch ain't a repeater."

Owing to the advent of Xmas, the next number of

"Short Stories"

will be on Sale on Saturday, December 24th, instead of the following Tuesday.

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THE FINAL WAR

BY

LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Shadow Hand," "An American Emperor," "The Lost Provinces," etc.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"À PARIS!"

SOME weeks elapsed before there was any severe fighting in France, after the tremendous events of June 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, in the environs of Rouen and Yvetot.

The French Government found it increasingly difficult to lay hands upon the subsidiary millions of men who always figure so largely in statistical enumerations of the Continental armies on the war footing. By this time the great mass of the people were utterly sick of a struggle which was clearly destined to bring nothing in its train, save personal loss and national humiliation.

But Paris was still France, and Paris was girding her loins for another siege. The military experts laughed at the idea of the threatened British investment of the fortifications. These, roughly speaking, inclose a ring of 125 miles, and to besiege Paris upon the lines adopted by the Germans in 1870, would require an armed force strong enough to resist sorties at every point of a circle measuring 130 miles along its inner circumference. Although England Canada, South Africa, and Australia had succeeded in lodging nearly a million of men upon French soil, it was obvious that for even this large force there was little hope of a successful attack upon the capital.

The total troops at Lord Roberts' disposal—it must not be forgotten that Sir Redvers Buller's Southern French Expedition would not be available for many weeks, even if entirely successful in the march through France—would barely suffice to encircle Paris with a line of men in double rank. Not, of course, that any such procedure would be necessary or possible, but the simple statement of fact demonstrates how difficult it would be to dispose the beleaguering corps in such manner as would enable them to check a determined assault delivered unexpectedly by the enemy in any definite locality.

Common sense at last began to prevail in the deliberations of the allies' Council of War. It was strongly urged, and not too hotly controverted, that the British army was invincible in the field, and that the most damaging tactics which could be employed against it was for the French to post themselves impregnably behind their *ceinture* of forts, and allow the English to spend their resources in vain upon the tremendous task of subduing Paris.

General Saussier himself saw the wisdom of this course, and he finally yielded to it, only stipulating that a well equipped army of 100,000 men should lie in the path of th British advance from Rouen, and delay and hamper thei progress in every possible way without engaging in opera tions upon a grand scale.

Above and beyond every other achievement, the duty of this Corps of Observation was to destroy roads and railways as it retired. Meanwhile it had to harass and annoy Lord Roberts to the utmost extent.

The scheme was sound enough in scope, but it counted upon one element which had, so far, been signally absent from the French plan of operations—Lord Roberts had a way of making his own arrangements, and his ideas had never hitherto coincided with those of the French leaders.

So he quietly detailed General Alleyne's division to keep the Observation Corps fully employed some ten miles beyond Rouen, while he personally devoted every energy to the concentration of troops and stores at this centre. Transport was, above all else, imperatively needed in abundance, and when the railway lines in the British rear got beyond the control of the limited staff available in the ranks of the army, the Commander-in-Chief asked the London and North Western Railway Company to take charge of the working arrangements.

Mr. Frederick Harrison, the general manager of that famous company, assumed personal control of this department, thus utilising what he ingeniously described as his "summer holiday," and the result was that trains were now run in France as they had never been run before.

Such was the extraordinary attitude of the people towards the conquerors, that quite a brisk passenger traffic was conducted between Havre, Honfleur, and Rouen, and a well-known provincial lawyer summed up the situation by saying: "The English have indeed beaten us, but at last we have got expresses."

Some weeks passed in active mobilisation before the English Commander-in-Chief felt himself sufficiently prepared to undertake the final rush forward to Paris.

Similar tactics had taken place in Germany, and the smart French papers, in their merciless analysis of events, did not scruple to point the moral for their disconsolate readers.

Thus the GIL BLAS said: "At the beginning of the war of 1870, Parisians cried 'À Berlin!' Ere many weeks had passed the Berliners retorted with roars of 'À Paris!' These English say nothing, but they are coming to both

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places. However, brave though they be, they will never return. The present generation of Frenchmen have not had time to forget the lessons of the last siege. We have food for years. Our forts are impregnable. We will dance behind our fortifications whilst our enemies die of sheer exhaustion."

Alleyne's division lay on the pleasant slopes of the south side of the Seine, with its centre in the quaint village of Pont de l'Arche. Two miles away were the French outposts, and for many days there had been warm but brief passages between the belligerents.

The Commander-in-Chief had ascertained that the country between this point and Paris was absolutely denuded of troops, and, what was more important, he knew that the railway was not yet destroyed, as the French naturally found it of the utmost convenience in supplying food, ammunition, and reinforcements to their fighting-line. But the French Commander, Général de Valois, deeming himself strong enough to retire in good order before an attack in force by the British, had made complete dispositions for blowing up bridges and embankments and derailing the lines at his convenience. He rested secure in the belief that no unforeseen circumstance could prevent the fulfilment of his mission. Any flanking movement by his opponents could not hinder the accomplishment of this portion of his duties, and a direct attack could not be so rapid as to interfere with his calculations.

Lord Roberts thought that it could.

On the night of July 5th—a day passed with less than ordinary excitement at the front—two fine columns, of 10,000 men in each, were drawn up a mile behind the British pickets.

They were led respectively by Brigadier-Generals Sir Frederick Carrington and F. J. Caldecott, and their object was to march, by parallel roads about a mile apart, right through the centre of the French position, and not to halt until they had reached Gaillon, a point eight miles in rear of the French lines.

Fighting, of course, they would have their fill of, but at any cost they must persevere in their advance, and thus act as a human wedge driven through the enemy, and leaving him open to be attacked and beaten in detail at dawn by the troops already *en route* from Rouen for that purpose.

There was no moon, and heavy clouds not only threatened rain, but rendered even the dark hours of a midsummer night oppressive in their impenetrable gloom.

Each officer and man in the columns knew exactly the purport and extent of the operations required from him, Lord Roberts' object being to secure, undamaged, a big slice of the main line to Paris. The Commander-in-Chief himself met the columns at their rendezvous in the outskirts of Pont de l'Arche, where the railway crosses the Seine to the south side.

Right in front lay the chalk hills strongly held by the French, and behind them the large village of Gaillon, where the French headquarters were situated. Lord Roberts felt that if the comparatively small, but carefully selected expedition, could only succeed in reaching and holding this centre until the culmination of the general attack at daybreak, the remainder of the railway to Vernon and Mantes, and thence to the environs of Paris, would be practically in his possession.

It was a bold stroke, and if matters went even a little to his liking a certain measure of success would be attained, for it would be much to have in his grasp the iron road even to Gaillon, which is nearly eighty miles from Havre, and about equidistant from Paris.

The chief difficulty which faced Sir Frederick Carrington and General Caldecott was to keep a straight direction towards Gaillon after the fighting commenced in the broken country.

They were discussing this matter with the chief when Harington, who attended Lord Roberts as aide-de-camp, was suddenly tempted to risk a snub by making a suggestion.

"Could not the drums and bugles be used?" he said.

"What on earth for?" said Lord Roberts.

Harington was sure that he had made an ass of himself, but he persisted bravely:

"Well, sir, it seems to me that once the attack begins the necessity for further concealment disappears. By placing some drums and bugles near the head of each column, accompanied by officers whose sole duty it would be to note the line of march, the men could always tell in which direction to rally after a skirmish."

The three experienced generals to whom he spoke listened in silence; then the two brigadiers looked at Lord Roberts to learn his opinion.

"It is a mad notion," he said at last: "but mad notions savour of genius in this campaign."

"It will be the most celebrated incident of the war if it comes off," said Sir Frederick Carrington.

"I like it," remarked Caldecott, with a laugh. "It will please the boys and astound the Frenchman."

The Commander-in-Chief turned sharply round upon Harington:

"Have you had a letter to-day from that girl, Lady What's her-name—I mean your sweetheart?"

Harington blushed down to his boots—or it felt something like it—as he admitted the justice of the Chief's extraordinary suspicion, for Irene was at Havre with her corps of nurses.

"Then, by all the gods of Asia, we'll do it!" cried Lord Roberts. "That young woman brings luck."

And that was how the famous "March of the Drums and Bugles" commenced.

How it ended is a matter of history.

When the advance guards of the columns encountered the French pickets the latter imagined that a reconnaissance was in progress, and promptly retired upon their supports. On the foot-hills of the range two regiments, the 61st and 117th Chasseurs à Pied, were encamped under arms, and they turned out to drive off the audacious midnight marauders who thus presumed to disturb their rest.

After a lively ten minutes with the 1st Battalion of the Highland Light Infantry and the 2nd Battalion of the Buffs, who led Carrington's column on the right, they found that there was unexpected trouble in store for them, and whilst they still strove to delay the advance the commandant hastily dispatched mounted messengers to the rear to warn the reserves.

About a quarter to one o'clock, as the two brigades were steadily breasting the hills, half-a-dozen bright rockets soared into the sky and lit up the landscape for miles around. They contained powerful illuminants expressly designed for the purpose of disclosing an enemy's whereabouts at night, and in their momentary radiance the full scope of the British attack was made clear to the French staff.

They were discussing the matter with the chief.

Hardly had the glare died out of the sky before there came to the ears of the astounded Frenchmen—loud above the rattle of musketry and the cries of the combatants—the measured boom of a big drum, played with all the energy of the drummer of the Buffs, followed by the quick rat-tat of the sidedrums beating a lively step.

Then the bugles rang out with triumphant clang, and for the next two hours relays of bandsmen kept up that never-to-be-forgotten roulade, with its far-sounding notes of simple but warlike music.

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The French gathered round the columns like flies, but they were swept aside as though a hurricane had burst upon them. Up the slope of the mountainous barrier, over its crest, and down the reverse marched the irresistible forces of England, never halting or faltering for a moment, suffering grievously, but inflicting much greater loss upon the enemy, driving their way through the French position with a cool and jubilant courage which dismayed and unnerved their opponents.

Amidst the wild uncertainty of fighting, the French leaders still strove to beat back this storm-cloud which seemed to travel along a predestined and cyclonic path.

Général de Valois, roused from a brief slumber, came to the front on an engine with the chief members of his staff, their chargers being hastily crowded into a horse-box behind.

When they reached the neighbourhood of the fight — Sir Frederick Carrington's column being much nearer than they guessed—they rode furiously forward to ascertain definitely what was in progress.

As they neared the fighting-line, with its chaotic surging of bewildered troops, and its mounted officers galloping madly to and fro, a new and wild fanfare of bugles and drums came to them on the breeze, for the big drum of the Buffs had been burst by a Lebel bullet, and the incident had been seized to relieve the breathless bandsmen with a fresh set.

"What devilry is this?" cried de Valois. "Is there a fête going on, then?" and he spurred ahead more eagerly.

"The English are amusing themselves with us, as usual," muttered a young aide-de-camp to himself.

At this moment some wooden outbuildings of a farmhouse flamed forth in rapid blaze. They had been fired by the command of a French colonel, who hoped by this means to fix a rallying point for his own men, and give them some guidance in a last desperate attempt to hurl back their assailants.

Into the zone of flickering light came the Highland Light Infantry, who were received with such a storm of lead that their colonel ordered them to halt and lie down for a few minutes.

Still shrilly dominating the crackling reports of the rifle duel, the bugles blew their cheerful strains, and the rattle of the drums kept up undaunted beat.

"'Strewth!" said a crouching Tommy to his front rank man. "They're playin' a bit of the revally. An' it's a nice summer mornin', ain't it?" he added, as a bullet knocked his helmet off.

The cause of the brief delay soon became apparent. Two flanking parties of Buffs had swept round on the French position unobserved, and were now attacking the defenders with the bayonet. The Highland Light Infantry charged in front, when the diversion thus created gave an opportunity. Général de Valois was knocked off his horse, his staff shot or captured, and before the driver of the "special" knew what was the matter, he was nearly rammed into the fire-box by an enthusiastic Clyde engineer.

"The excellent captain gives you a final chance," he explained.

General Caldecott's column was equally fortunate on the left. They came across the field telegraph line, which they promptly cut, and at 3 a.m. the first intimation received by the inhabitants of Gaillon of the proceedings among the chalk hills was given by the now wavering notes and

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unsteady beats of bugles and drums marching through the village street.

Meeting here, Sir Frederick Carrington and General Caldecott exchanged a hasty hand grip, and at once took steps to render their victory complete.

A train was got together and ordered to proceed cautiously to Vernon, whither it would be followed by a second and a third, whilst reinforcements would be sent by road as speedily as might be.

Caldecott's column now retraced its steps along the line towards the French position, to safeguard it from attempts at destruction by isolated parties from the French right and left.

The precaution was wise but needless.

The whole of the French army was now subjected to a bitter attack by a superior force, and the growing daylight showed that they had been hopelessly scattered over a wide expanse of country. Pursuit was kept up by cavalry all day, as Lord Roberts was determined to prevent anything in the nature of concentration of small brigades. He wanted to have his hands free for the march to Paris.

On the second morning after the battle, the country being now fairly clear after the desultory fighting that had gone on for many hours, scouting parties of fresh cavalry and cyclists were formed for the purpose of thoroughly exploring the valley of the Epte and the Plaine de Sainte André.

Among these the Catford Cyclists Corps was prominent, and at their head was William Briggs, less stout and more soldierly than when we last saw him at the "Cat and Anchor."

War, with its tremendous significance to the individual, moulds a man's character with compelling touches, and Briggs was quieter, more self-contained, more serious in demeanour, after these few weeks of momentous campaigning.

There was little trace of the old-time bombast in the manner in which he gave orders to his followers. In one respect alone did his wonted weakness for display manifest itself. Big and heavy in his proportions, he was yet the fastest rider of them all, and it was with loving care that he inflated the tyres of his bike that morning preparatory to the long ride before him.

For twenty miles the party passed through peaceful villages and broad stretches of pasture land and cornfields, in which the peasants were tending their cattle and crops as though the epoch-making events occurring in the locality belonged to another country.

At some little distance from the village of Beuil, where a small bridge in the centre of the hamlet spans the river Euse, the cyclists entered upon a broad straight road, that above all else suggested a fast "spin."

Four of them at once took the lead, and were separated by a hundred yards from their companions when they raced into the village street, shaded by leafy chestnuts and walnut trees, and seemingly the quietest and most sequestered spot they had yet encountered in their extended reconnaissance.

In an instant the place blazed into sudden life with sputtering rifle-shots, and the screams of frightened women and children.

Brigg's three comrades were shot dead, and he himself only escaped a similar fate by a heavy fall over a kerbstone, which momentarily rendered him incapable of movement.

The remainder of the detachment pulled up and strove to make some show against the company of Zouaves they had so suddenly encountered. But the affair was hopeless from the outset. Barely a third of the party succeeded in racing off again, and many of them were wounded.

When Briggs recovered his breath he found himself surrounded by a group of soldiers, who surveyed him with grim curiosity, and an officer addressed him in French.

Briggs had managed to pick up a few words of the language, but he was quite unable to follow the rapid utterance of his questioner, whereupon the Frenchman used some English words:

"Spy, shoot you, is it not, in three minutes!"

"I am no spy," replied Briggs calmly, though his heart throbbed tumultuously as he looked at the officer's stern face. "I am a scout. *Vous savvy. C'est proper dang la guerre.*"

Again the Frenchman became voluble, but he apparently addressed some questions to Briggs, who wholly failed to understand him. Someone was sent for, and a young soldier appeared who spoke English perfectly.

"The officer says," he told Briggs, "that he can shoot you as a spy—just now, this moment. And he will do this thing except on one condition. If you tell him truly the present position of your army and its line of march, with the strength of the leading divisions, he will grant you your life."

Briggs rose to his feet and looked proudly about him, for he was taller by inches than any of the Zouaves. "It is your officer, then, who would indeed make me a spy?" he said.

The Frenchman flushed, and the officer did not wait for the translation, for he had caught the drift of the words. He impatiently gave some orders, and the Englishman was placed with his back against the gable end of a house, whilst eight men drew up in single rank at ten paces distance and shouldered their Lebel rifles.

A fierce impulse seized him to rush upon them and surrender his life in desperate barter, but the succeeding thought showed him that the nobler way to die was with the dignified demeanour of a soldier who gave all for his country.

Again the young interpreter approached.

"The excellent captain gives you a final chance," he explained. "There is no dishonour in giving information which will be easily obtained before to-morrow. Will you, for the last time, tell him what he has asked you? Why don't you lie, you fool?" he added quickly, in an undertone.

Briggs looked at him with the glistening eyes of a hunted animal, but his thoughts were far away amidst the pleasant lanes of Kent, where his wife and little ones lived in a creeper-covered cottage during the summer months.

Anon his memories strayed to the bar-parlour of the inn at Catford where his voice was the loudest and his laugh the heartiest during the nightly gathering.

"Will you not answer?" came the sharp query, whilst the Zouave left his side and the officer raised his sword.

"Yes," cried Briggs. "Tell him——" Then he remembered, perhaps, the translator would not gratify his wish.

"*Ecoutez-vous, soldats Français,*" he said in loud clear tones. "*La Hongletaire est la première nation de la monde!*"

There was an appreciable pause, and the firing-party stood at the ready.

Trees, sky, and houses began to dance madly before the Englishman's eyes, but he shouted again so vehemently that he was heard far down the village street: "*La Hongletaire est la première—*"

But he stopped, for out of the gathering mist in which all things were fast merging, there loomed in front of him the figure of the officer, who placed his hand upon his shoulder and spoke to him in kindly tones.

He turned with amazement to the young soldier who had previously addressed him, and the latter explained: "We Frenchmen do not commit murder," he said. "The officer but did try you to the end. He wishes you to rejoin your army."

And the officer himself, shaking Briggs vigorously by the hand, exclaimed:

"*Vous êtes brav' homme, m'sieur. Votre chemin est par là,*" and he pointed along the road to Vernon.

(To be continued.)

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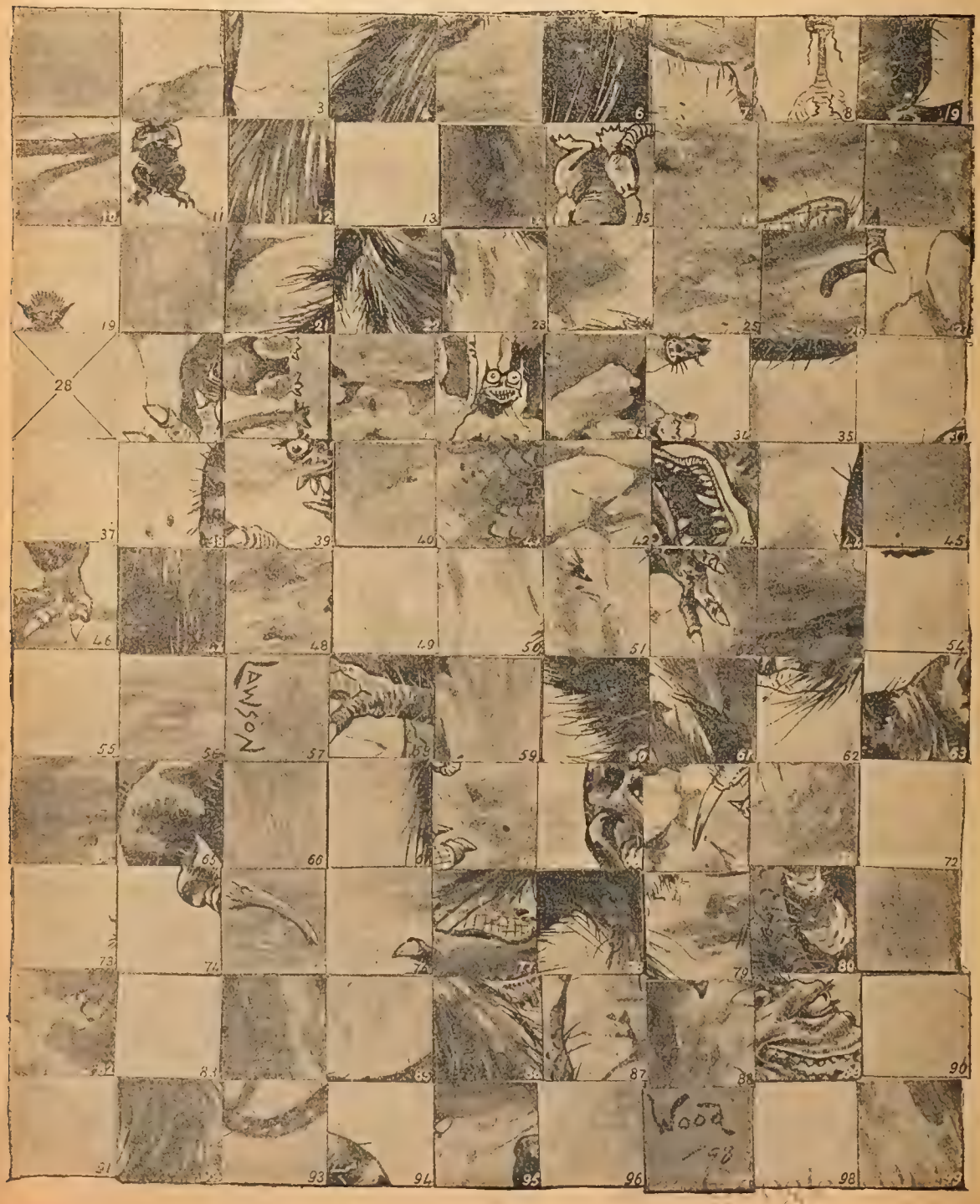
MIXED PICTURE COMPETITION.

Cut out each of the following squares and paste them up on a sheet of paper to form a picture. Then copy out the figures in the re-arranged order, and send them to us in an envelope marked PICTURE. The squares are turned various ways, and that marked 28 is a blank. £2 2s. will be sent to the reader whose attempt is correct, or most nearly correct, and a copy of Annis Lennoy's book, "In a Chinese Garden," to each of the next twenty-five. In the event of a tie, the prizes will go to those whose solutions arrive first. Date of closing, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20th.



A Plunge for a Wife.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

By CATHERINE ADAMS.

"Well, Miss Vanfontein, and how shall we celebrate Christmas?" asked the Captain.

He was apparently addressing the heiress—possibly he thought she ought to be deferred to occasionally—but his eye sought Mrs. Pilcardy, a vivacious grass-widow.

"I really don't know," said Miss Vanfontein at length. She was rather scarce of ideas as a rule, and was not vivacious like Mrs. Pilcardy.

The heiress had been to the Cape to see some of her dead father's relatives, and she was now returning home by the liner *Silenus*. She lived at Tunbridge Wells with her maiden aunt, and was the absolute mistress of some £12,000 a year. But with all her wealth she was a very unassuming little person, rather insipid some people thought, but those who knew her well could testify that she was thoroughly to be depended on. As to her person, she was small, decidedly not pretty, and had pale blue eyes and dark brown hair.

Mrs. Pilcardy waited for a minute, tactfully giving Miss Vanfontein time to evolve a suggestion, then as none seemed forthcoming she prepared for action.

She was a handsome brunette with very expressive brown eyes.

There was a slight pause in the general conversation, and Mrs. Pilcardy adroitly attracted attention by firing off her small gun during the lull.

"I have an idea," she said demurely.

Seeing the inquiring look on the faces turned towards his end of the table, Captain Simmons explained that he was open to receive suggestions anent the forthcoming celebration of Christmas on board the *Silenus*.

"Mrs. Pilcardy is going to suggest something," he said.

"Oh, *please*," said the lady, "I do not feel equal to so much attention. It quite overcomes me."

"By jove! does she not, though?" whispered one man to his neighbour.

"And really, Captain Simmons, I am sorry that *I* spoke. My idea is not novel, not original, indeed it is so old that I feel quite ashamed to put it forward."

"Oh, come, Mrs. Pilcardy, we won't be hard on you," said someone reassuringly.

"Well, I suggest that we form a Christmas Festivity Committee, and arrange to have tableaux and theatricals on Christmas Eve, a series of old-fashioned games and forfeits on the evening of Christmas day, and on Boxing Day, a grand entertainment by way of bringing things to a successful climax. I propose that some of the gentlemen form a Sports Committee, which shall arrange something very unique in the way of sports for the morning or afternoon, and then in the evening wind up the festivities with a grand Masque Ball, prizes to be awarded to the wearers of the most effective and original costumes."

"Rather a big order!" said some gentleman.

"Quite a formidable programme," said another.

"I am quite sure that it can be carried through," said the Captain, thankful to find the task of suggestion and execution taken off his own shoulders.

As it only wanted a week to Christmas the ensuing days were full of the bustle of preparations. Possibly the members of the "Silenus Dramatic Society," bore the brunt of the work, for a vast amount of time was devoted to rehearsals.

The stage manager was a veritable *gourmand* for work, and he whipped up the lukewarm members of his company with commendable perseverance. As for the ladies, they were indefatigable; no amount of rehearsing or trying on of costumes seemed too much for their energies.

The Sports Committee contributed their quota to the work in hand very comfortably. They met for the most part in the smoking saloon, and as their labours tended to an unusual consumption of cigars and drinks, it is to be supposed that a great deal of oratory and energy was expended on the "programme of good, old-fashioned English sports" before it was finally drawn up and approved.

Though Miss Vanfontein had begged her hardest to be excused from taking part in the performance for Christmas Eve, she had at length been persuaded to help in one of the tableaux.

"Ridiculous!" said the florid Miss Chattaway to her sister in the privacy of their state-room, "why they

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want such a colourless bit of goods in the tableau, I can't imagine!"

"So vapid, too," replied her sister, "she does not seem to have an opinion on anything. I should not be at all surprised if she were to die an old maid for lack of not being able to make up her mind."

"It will not be for want of chances, then. Such a golden bait as she can hold out ought to make the fish rise fast enough."

"Indeed, yes," sighed the other, as she remembered the futility of her own long and persistent angling. "Men of to-day like well-gilded pills when they are forced to swallow matrimony."

Strangely enough, the subject of their remarks was also dwelling on the possibility of marriage.

She had had many offers, but she had refused them all from a morbid dread of being chosen for her wealth and not for herself.

"I shall be twenty-seven next month," she soliloquised as she brushed out her long hair. "Really, it is, as Aunt Martha says, quite time for me to choose a husband if I intend to marry."

She looked at her reflection in the glass, and by the bright glare of the electric light she espied two short white hairs standing up assertively among the curls of her fringe. She pulled them out quite viciously.

"Good Heavens! I shall look forty soon. Yes it is really time!" and then she sighed. All that night her dreams were disturbed by the attempt to rightly appraise the different qualities of two gentlemen who chanced to be voyaging to the old country on the *Silenus*.

During the past autumn she had seen a great deal of Major Ffoulkes and Mr. Baynes, and had received marked attentions from both. The major was rather a notable, and he was now on his way home to receive the coveted V.C.

Women love heroes, and as Major Ffoulkes was a very good-looking one, he came in for plenty of adulation. Minnie Vanfontein was a little creature, with plenty of latent love in her nature waiting to be stirred by the mighty god.

The Major's advances were not repelled, and she would have been quite ready to fall at his feet and worship him if her tendency to distrust all admirers had not held her in check. To-night something had happened to accelerate that distrust, for she had overheard a little conversation between Major Ffoulkes and one of his friends, and she was almost certain that it had referred to herself.

The ladies had all left the deck and gone below for the night, when Miss Vanfontein suddenly remembered that she had left her writing-pad on her deck-chair. Hurrying back to recover it, she had been arrested when half-way up the companion by the sound of voices.

"Well," said one with a boastful accent, "things look fairly promising. What will you bet me that I don't bring it off before we sight land?"

The voice was unmistakably that of the Major.

"I couldn't possibly lay anything on such a certainty as that," replied another voice. "I suppose that you will cut the service when you marry?"

"Rather!" the major had replied.

And then Miss Vanfontein crept away. Had Major Ffoulkes been alluding to herself? If so it was abominable, infamous! And so this was why the poor little soul pondered and worried and drew comparisons between the Major and her other admirer, John Baynes.

"Mr. Baynes is very nice, only not nearly so distinguished as the Major, and not nearly so good-looking. Neither is his family so good. Not that that matters. I only want someone to be good to me and love me for myself. How I wish I could see into their hearts and find out if they are really in earnest."

It was a pity she could not, for whereas she would soon have discovered that the Major's feeling for her was a selfish one, born of his desire to improve the impoverished estates he expected to succeed to, that of John Baynes was a pure and unselfish one.

Baynes was possessed of very fair private means, and he held a lucrative appointment under a celebrated firm of engineers, altogether he was in a position to support a wife very comfortably indeed. But he was a diffident man, and, as yet, was very far from sure that he had the remotest chance with the heiress. "For," he thought, "however could I make her believe that I had no ulterior view in asking her to be my wife?"

"Ffoulkes is pressing on pretty hard now, is he not?" asked his great friend, Clifford, one night.

Clifford was the first mate of the *Silenus*. He and Baynes had been apprentices together, in those days when John had thought a sea life the only life possible.

"I should think we might hear a bit of news before we land," said the mate, as his companion vouchsafed no reply.

"Oh, you do, do you?" then fiercely, "confound the Major!"

"Amen to that sentiment! I hate the fellow with his airs and graces. If a man has done a plucky thing, he should be all the more modest. Pooh! he has not done half so much as some poor beggars at sea have to do in dirty weather."

"But it is just where he scores off a fellow like myself," said Baynes ruefully. "I have no chance of showing my pluck, so Minnie—I mean Miss Vanfontein—doesn't know that I have any. But I have, and I only wish I could do something to show that I care for her and not her beastly fortune."

"Don't rile at the bawbees, my boy, you may be glad of them some day."

"Never!" said the other, "I'd marry her if she hadn't a penny. But I can't tell her so. She has refused a heap of fellows because she believes they want her money. I'd do anything to win her, I'd jump overboard, or I would——"

"By Jove! I have it!" said Clifford, and he jumped up and was gone in a flash.

Before Baynes could recover from his surprise, the mate was back again, with a bundle of papers and magazines.

"Look here; I hunted these up, thinking they might help the ladies with an idea for a tableau. And now, great Scott! if you and I, Jack, don't prepare the best tableau of the lot!"

"You have got a touch of the sun," put in Baynes.

"You'll live to thank me yet," said the mate, ignoring his friend's remark. "Look at this."

He opened the illustrated pages of an old Christmas number, and pointed to the picture depicting the dilemma of a young lady who was voyaging on a steamer, and who, in order to help her selection of a husband from the crowd of admirers on board, hit upon the peculiar expedient of jumping overboard and choosing the man who first came to her rescue.

"I'll keep this number back," said Clifford, "and I'll find an opportunity to give it to Miss Vanfontein when she is alone. I shall take care to draw her attention to the picture which possibly may lead her to do likewise, and then——"

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"Good Heavens! do you mean to advise *her* to go overboard?"

"Why not? It would be a splendid chance for you to rush to the rescue, and I promise you to be on the alert and do all I can to minimise the fear of danger."

"Danger! I would not have an hair of her head injured."

"Baynes, I give you my word of honour that there is no danger. If she cottons to the idea, I will gently hint to her what would be the best time of day, also what part of the vessel would be safest to take her header from," said this Machiavellian seaman.

Finally he overbore the other's remonstrances, and next day he found a chance of presenting the magazine to Miss Vanfontein.

"I thought you might get an idea for your ball costume, Miss Vanfontein," and then, adroitly turning the leaves and the conversation at the same time, he showed her the pictorial story of the young lady who had such difficulty in selecting a husband.

Miss Vanfontein looked long and silently at the pictures and read the letter-press attentively.

"Rather a strange mode of getting out of a difficulty, and somewhat dangerous, I should think."

"Not at all if she went well for'ard and took off from the side. No danger at all if she chose a calm day and took care to see that the right people were at hand to rescue her.

"There!" he chuckled, when he left her to digest the picture and his remarks, "I could not have done better if I had graduated in a school of diplomacy. It's all right," he told Baynes, "I believe she means business, I took care to inform her that the afternoon would be best for such a performance, and of course that's my watch then."

Mr. Baynes turned quite pale.

"Clifford, I can't allow it, I feel it my duty to warn her——"

"Stuff and nonsense! Can't you be thankful for what the gods send you? By-the-bye, she is a splendid swimmer."

"Oh! is she?" said Baynes, half convinced.

All the same he was in a state of great mental excitement for the next few days, and he frequented the fore deck on each afternoon, dreading, he hardly knew what.

But nothing happened. And at last, Christmas Eve, with all its exciting concomitants of tableaux and dramatic performances, arrived.

Miss Vanfontein did not often hazard a remark at meals unless first addressed, so there was a little thrill of interest occasioned when she asked the Captain, with a nervous tremour in her voice, if there were any sharks about.

"Sharks, Miss Vanfontein? Not in these waters. We shan't catch sight of the beasts until we are nearer land. Wait till we sight Cape Verd; possibly there may be a few to be seen then."

"And when will that be?"

"In a few days' time. Possibly next Wednesday," and the Captain went on with his dinner.

A look of relief passed over the heiress's face, but a feeling of horror nearly overcame John Baynes as he reflected that there *might* be a stray shark about.

When the passengers went up on deck and the members of the "Silenus Dramatic Society" disappeared to prepare for the performance, Clifford came up to John Baynes with a "I told you so!" look on his face.

"Heard that about the sharks, old man? I believe she will do it to-morrow!"

Owing to his anxiety regarding Miss Vanfontein's intentions, poor Baynes did not much enjoy the dramatic treat provided by his fellow voyagers; and he forbore to make the most of the opportunity he had of making himself pleasant to the heiress when she came and sat among the audience after performing her part in the tableaux.

"Well," she said with her shy smile, "how did you like it? Did I tremble much? How did it go off?"

"Oh, yes, yes; very nice, very nice indeed," he said hastily.

"Poor Andromeda!" she said, softly. "Perseus saved her from a terrible fate, did he not?"

"She might have been eaten by sharks," he replied.

Miss Vanfontein stared at him aghast.

"Oh, really!" she protested, "I never heard that, I always understood she was threatened by some terrible sea-monster, but not sharks, Mr. Baynes."

"Oh, well," he said recovering himself quickly, "mythology is mythical, always, and it might have been a shark."

Mr. Baynes showed no delight in the really creditable performance of the musical dialogue acted by two vivacious young ladies, nor did he evince emotion, when, in the final scene of "The Truant Prince," Mrs. Pilcady appeared with her hair all down her back and visible tears streaming down her cheeks. Neither did he laugh when they distinctly overheard a lady behind let out the secrets of the dressing-room, and tell her neighbour that the tears were streaks of vaseline and the hair—"Well, a good bit of it pinned on, my dear, only you must not tell!"

While the others were in shrieks of laughter at the extravaganza that concluded the entertainment, the muscles of Mr. Baynes' face never relaxed once. Miss Vanfontein felt disappointed, she had always thought him very easily amused, and he was always ready to smile at her own little jokes. But perhaps, there was a reason for that, and at the thought she shrank up into her shell again, vexed to think she had been so amiable to him.

"What's the matter with Baynes? He looks as if he had been crossed in love," said Major Ffoulkes, taking the seat lately vacated by Baynes.

"I should say that he had," said a pert girl sitting on the other side of the heiress, and shooting a quizzical glance in her direction.

Miss Vanfontein blushed.

"I should say it was the heat," she said severely, "did I not overhear someone remarking that he cordially echoed Sydney Smith's wish to be able to 'sit in his bones,' and that he would like them to be packed away in the chef's refrigerator?"

"I believe I did say something of the sort," owned the Major, "and I think I had just cause, we are not very far off from the line, now."

But Miss Vanfontein was angry with herself for the blush, and vexed with her neighbours for causing it. So, what should have proved a most enjoyable evening was, as far as two of the audience were concerned, very disappointing.

Christmas Day was ushered in by a comical attempt to imitate the old English custom of carol-singing. A few sturdy sailors with sonorous voices, helped by a few musical *esprits* from the steerage passengers, promenaded the decks very early, singing "While shepherds watched," and "Hark! the herald angels sing." Lack of rehearsals and a proficient bâton caused the rendering to be somewhat wanting in precision and tune, and there

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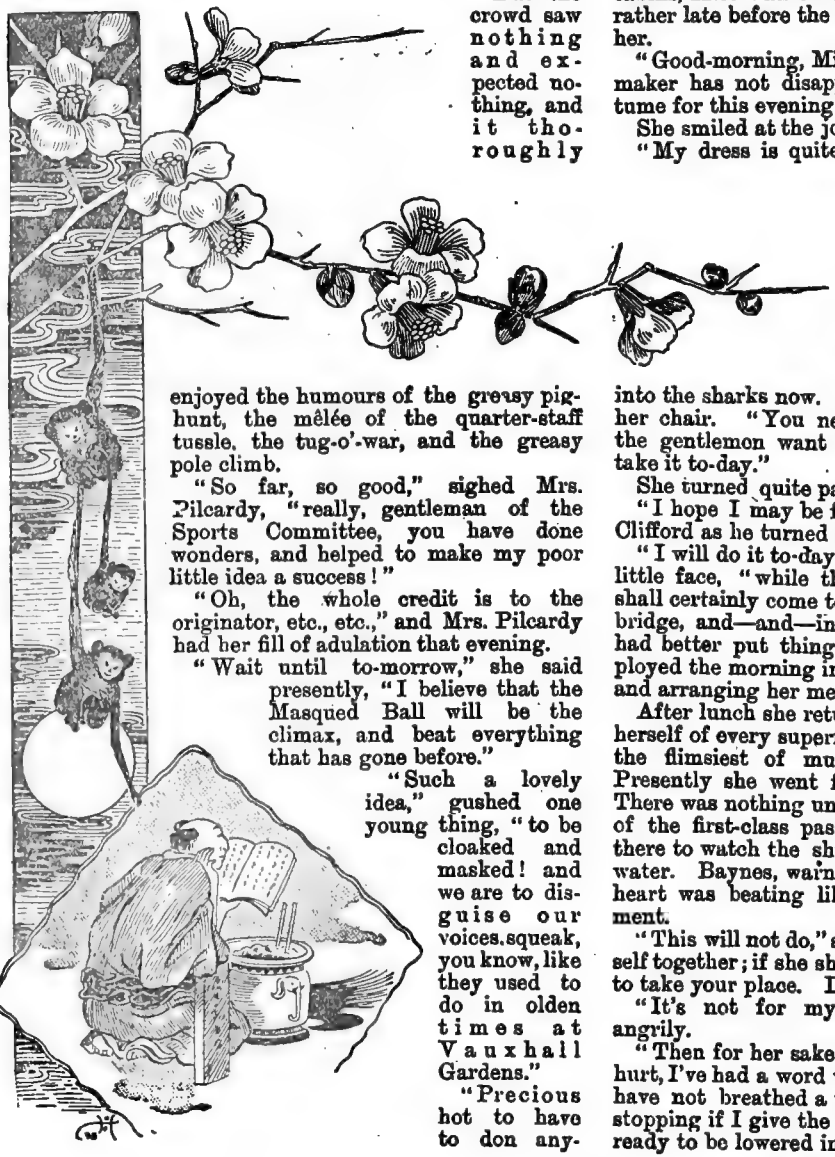
was a superabundance of bass; still the voices made up in gusto and abandon what they failed in artistic training, and the morning opened auspiciously.

After service and luncheon they all repaired to the promenade deck to witness the "Unrivalled Fête and Exhibition of Old English Sports."

Mr. Baynes kept an anxious eye upon the movements of the heiress. He was quite sure that if she made the attempt to jump overboard, it would be in the afternoon, during Clifford's watch.

It was a very calm day, the sea scarcely heaved, and the only movement was caused by the screw of the great steamer as she ploughed her way northward.

Once or twice Baynes caught Miss Vanfontein looking fixedly out to sea with a peculiarly intent gaze. He wished most heartily that Clifford had not shown that picture to the heiress, for the suspense was awful.



But the crowd saw nothing and expected nothing, and it thoroughly enjoyed the humours of the greasy pig-hunt, the mêlée of the quarter-staff tussle, the tug-o'-war, and the greasy pole climb.

"So far, so good," sighed Mrs. Pilcardy, "really, gentleman of the Sports Committee, you have done wonders, and helped to make my poor little idea a success!"

"Oh, the whole credit is to the originator, etc., etc.," and Mrs. Pilcardy had her fill of adulation that evening.

"Wait until to-morrow," she said presently, "I believe that the Masqued Ball will be the climax, and beat everything that has gone before."

"Such a lovely idea," gushed one young thing, "to be cloaked and masked! and we are to disguise our voices, squeak, you know, like they used to do in olden times at Vauxhall Gardens."

"Precious hot to have to don anything extra this weather," grumbled one portly gentleman.

"Ah, but you need not overdo it underneath," advised the ship's doctor, who needless to say was an Irishman.

"Clifford," said Baynes, when dinner was over, and the company, with a very good grace, had partaken of hot roast beef and hot plum pudding with the thermometer at 103deg. in the shade, "I can't stand this any longer, it's wearing me quite out."

"Umph!" said Clifford, "you do look rather chippy. But it is wearing, I admit. I've been on the look-out all this blessed afternoon. I'll give her a hint to-morrow morning."

On Boxing Day most of the ladies did not rise very early, wisely electing to reserve their strength for the ball. A great many had their breakfasts served in their cabins, Miss Vanfontein among the number, so it was rather late before the mate had a chance of speaking to her.

"Good-morning, Miss Vanfontein, I hope the dressmaker has not disappointed you regarding your costume for this evening?"

She smiled at the joke.

"My dress is quite ready, but I shall give you no further information, for no one knows what anyone else is to wear!"

"Well, I suppose we shall have queerer company soon than what we shall see to-night," he said.

"Oh!" and she looked her mystification.

"We shall soon be running into the sharks now. Oh!" for she had jumped up from her chair. "You need not be alarmed, but if any of the gentlemen want a swim I should advise them to take it to-day."

She turned quite pale.

"I hope I may be forgiven for such lies," thought Clifford as he turned away.

"I will do it to-day," she said with a set, determined little face, "while that nice Mr. Clifford is about, I shall certainly come to no harm if he is near or on the bridge, and—and—in case anything *should* happen I had better put things in order a little." So she employed the morning in writing directions for her maid, and arranging her memoranda and letters.

After lunch she returned to her cabin, and divesting herself of every superfluous bit of clothing, she put on the flimsiest of muslins and then went on deck. Presently she went forward and on to the fore-deck. There was nothing unusual in such an action, as some of the first-class passengers were very fond of going there to watch the ship cleaving her way through the water. Baynes, warned by Clifford, followed her. His heart was beating like a sledge-hammer with excitement.

"This will not do," said the mate, "you must pull yourself together; if she should bring it off now, I shall have to take your place. Don't lose heart now."

"It's not for myself, it's for *her*," said Baynes angrily.

"Then for her sake pull yourself together. She can't hurt, I've had a word with the chief engineer—no, no! I have not breathed a word, the engines won't be long in stopping if I give the word—and there's a boat close by ready to be lowered immediately I give the signal. And

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by George! Do you see? She has changed her dress. She means business this afternoon. Here comes the Major, now keep your weather-eye open."

Miss Vanfontein sauntered to the side of the vessel with a seemingly nonchalant air. In reality her excitement and nervousness were infinitely more pronounced than that of John Baynes.

She looked with awe into the green depths below, then she looked towards the stern where the screw had left a white track which spread far behind, showing the course of the vessel. No, it would not do to be caught in the great wash which surged up and down in the wake of the *Silenus*. She must jump well off the side and from her present position on the fore-deck.

She shivered a little, though the sun poured down with fierce rays. Presently, she gave a little glance round. Yes, the Major and Mr. Baynes were both in her vicinity and the mate was on the bridge. Only a few steerage passengers were between her and the two men whose courage she wished to test.

She made ready to spring—but at the vital moment her courage failed her. She caught up her Dachsund, Fido, and flung him far out into the waves. Then, with a shriek, she shrank from view and cowered down behind a pile of empty fish baskets.

It happened so suddenly that the people near, hearing the splash and missing Miss Vanfontein at the same moment, concluded that it was she who had gone overboard.

"Man overboard!" they shouted in chorus.

Clifford was the only person who saw what really happened. He rang the electric bells to the engine-room, giving the signal to stop, and he shouted an order for the boat to be lowered, then he came rushing along to the fore-deck to Baynes and the Major.

"Good Heavens! It's Miss Vanfontein! She's gone over!"

"Where!" cried Baynes, rushing to the side.

"Where!" shouted the Major.

"There! yonder she goes," cried the mate, pointing to a dark object bobbing up and down in the water, and which the speed of the vessel had left some distance behind.

It is to be hoped that the recording angel was not very hard upon the mate of the *Silenus* at this particular juncture of his career.

At this moment the great engines stopped in what Captain Simmons afterwards thought to be an unprecedented minimum of time, and as he came up to order a boat to be lowered he found the men already busy with it.

And he again congratulated himself on the exceeding smartness of his officers and men.

But John Baynes had already plunged in to the rescue. He had not seen the accident, but at the first word from the mate he had rushed aft, and flinging off his coat, he had taken a header into the waves.

Major Foulkes did not stir from where the boat was being launched.

"Can't you swim? Are you not going to try for her?" said the mate cynically.

"Yes, I can swim. But one fool need not make many. If a woman likes to be so stupid as to jump or fall overboard when the ship's going at full speed, she must take her chance."

And Miss Vanfontein heard every word he said.

She came forward at once.

"Thank you!" she said, flashing a glance at him that would have credited a Bernhardt.

The Captain came up.

"Who the dickens is overboard then?" he said, staring angrily at the heiress.

"My dog is," said she calmly.

Then the Captain turned about, and he swore for the space of half-a-minute in the best, double-distilled, seagoing vernacular.

He apologised afterwards, but it must be admitted that he was hard pressed when he found his vessel had been stopped all for the sake of a poor little whipper-snapper of a—but there! what he said about that dog is not worth repeating.

"And now there's the deuce to pay," said Clifford mendaciously, "for poor Baynes, thinking that it was Miss Vanfontein gone overboard, dashed like a maniac to the rescue, and," he lowered his voice for dramatic effect, "he's a very poor swimmer."

"Oh!" shrieked the heiress, and she wrung her hands desperately.

"Oh!" roared the Captain, "what a consummate ass! What a fool!"

"Sir!" Miss Vanfontein turned on him like a fury. Could it be possible that such a meek and mild little person could be so transformed? "Sir," she repeated, "Mr. Baynes is neither an ass, nor a fool!" She nearly choked over the words. "He is a gentleman and a very brave one. He is not the only person who made the mistake of thinking that it was I who had fallen over. There are others, but they did not think fit to move."

Though she spoke in the plural number she turned a withering glance in the Major's direction.

"Oh, Mr. Clifford, can't you do something?" she appealed to the mate. "Oh, do please save him!" Then she broke down completely and sobbed hysterically.

"Take her below—take her below!" said the Captain testily. Some ladies who had been attracted from their siestas by the commotion, kindly took charge of the heiress and, in spite of her protestations, dragged her to her cabin, where they administered smelling-salts and such consolation as they could.

"Oh! he will be drowned!" she cried between her sobs.

"We must hope for the best," one told her, "and oh! there goes the boat." She was looking through the porthole as she spoke. "The engines were stopped so quickly, Mr. Baynes can't be very far off."

Meanwhile, Baynes had struck out vigorously towards a black object which he could see floating in the distance. But though he was swimming fast he wondered why he could not get near. The fact was that poor doggie was doing his best to keep afloat, only he was going away from the steamer. Baynes began to feel rather exhausted by the time he succeeded in getting to close quarters. He was short sighted and had no idea that the object he was endeavouring to reach was other than the dark head of the heiress. He looked round to see if the boat were coming.

"Boat ahoy!" he called faintly. He began to have his doubt of holding out much longer.

"This way!" he called, "Miss Vanfontein, you are going away from the ship. There's a boat coming along."

Then as he got still nearer, he wondered if his senses were leaving him. What was it, and where was the heiress?

The splash of oars sounded close.

"All right," called the third mate. "We'll soon hand you in, and then we'll take in the little dog."

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"Miss Vanfontein?" gasped Baynes.

"Is safe on board. 'Twas the little dog that fell over."

Baynes groaned aloud. Then all his arduous work had been in vain! He ground his teeth and reviled the interfering Clifford. The sailors thought he was done up as they lifted him in and he sank in a heap at the bottom of the boat.

"I should like to peg out after this," he thought, "I'll sham unconsciousness, I really could not stand any chaff just yet." He lay very still and with closed eyes.

"Case for the doctor," said the third mate, "go it, men, pull your hardest."

"Oh!" shrieked one of the ladies ministering to Miss Vanfontein, "here is the boat coming back! There is your dog, Miss Vanfontein, *he* is all right, shaking himself, but oh! *poor* Mr. Baynes, he is lying at the bottom of the boat, and oh! my dear, my dear, I think you must prepare for the worst!"

They were kind-hearted souls, and they wept in company with the distracted heiress.

When the boat came alongside it took some minutes to haul up the apparently lifeless body of Mr. Baynes. The people on deck were waved back without ceremony, a stretcher was brought and Baynes was conveyed to the doctor's quarters. Clifford, entirely taken back by this unexpected turn of events, followed anxiously.

"He was swimming well and strongly," he thought, "what can have turned him like that?"

The doctor gave his orders and made his preparations quickly enough. He had been having a nap and had heard nothing of the incident until the boat was returning. He thought it a case for resuscitation from drowning.

"Look here! doctor," whispered Clifford anxiously, "I think he his only exhausted. Send the others away."

The doctor cleared the room, and then proceeded to felt his patient's pulse.

"Why!" he ejaculated.

The lifeless body sat up erect.

"Look here, doctor. I am all right, only I don't want to come round just yet, see?"

The doctor thought he did.

"Oh! you scoundrel!" cried Baynes, shaking his fist at Clifford.

"Don't call me names," said the mate.

"I think it would be only right to inform the lady who was the cause of your immersion of your recovery, for I hear she is in a great way," said the doctor.

"Oh, is she?" said Baynes, colouring up to his ears.

"Umph! I suppose it is a case of love me, love my dog?" said the doctor with a grin.

"Perhaps it is," said Baynes.

"I think I will go and allay Miss Vanfontein's anxiety," said the astute mate.

But he only allayed her fears a little.

He thought it just as well to pile on the agony for a little longer.

"There is just a chance for the poor fellow," he said, "but I don't think I'd build on it too much. The doctor is doing his level best, but it may be some time yet before he recovers—if he does," he added significantly.

And so Mr. Baynes' recovery was kept dark for a little longer, but at tea-time the mate had pity on the distress of Miss Vanfontein.

"He is coming round," he told her. "In fact, I should not be surprised if he turns up at the ball tonight, and if he does—he has been through something, Miss Vanfontein—you will be nice to him, won't you? and thank him for what he has done?"

"Oh, I will, I will!" she cried with shining eyes, and clasping her hands nervously.

"That is all right," chuckled the mate as he retired.

When the Masque Ball was at its brightest and merriest, a tall figure, wearing the regulation mask and domino, came on deck rather late.

Miss Vanfontein had purposely abstained from dancing, and she had been busy trying to identify some of the gentlemen. She was certain that the late comer was Baynes. The electric light made the ship as bright as at noontide, and she could see quite plainly the little gold snake ring which he always wore on his little finger.

Rendered brave by her disguise, she went boldly up to him.

"Come," she said, touching him on the arm, "I wish to speak to you."

He followed her without a word on to the fore-deck, where there was comparative solitude. "Is it Mr. Baynes?" she asked, as they moved to the side of the vessel.

There was a full moon, the night was cloudless, the sea glimmered in the silver radiance, and as they turned to seaward, the light fell on Miss Vanfontein's quivering face as she removed her mask.

"Will you take yours off?" she said sharply, "I want to be quite sure of you."

He did as she requested and she saw John Baynes' face, pale and earnest, in the moonbeams.

"How ever am I to thank you?" she asked. "I know that you thought that it was I who had gone overboard I think you are one of the bravest of men. How can I thank you?"

His eyes were pregnant with a great emotion, but he never spoke.

Was it possible? she thought. Did this man love her self and not her wretched fortune?

"If," he said, after a long pause, and in unsteady tones, "if you were a penniless girl, I would tell you how you might thank me."

"Tell me," she said softly. "Just imagine that I am a penniless girl, and—tell me."

Then he told her.

Johnson: "Some people are continually wanting to know the why and wherefore of everything. They are not content to accept facts as they find them."

Jackson: "Yes, you're right. I wonder why it is?"

Jacob: "How was it I didn't see you at the Oppenheimer wedding, Ikey?"

Isaac: "It cost me too much, Jakey, to send a present. So I just ask how such a nice young man could marry into such a family, and I gets no invitation."

"What's the matter with my darling?" asked the fond mother as she came upon her little one, crushed in a heap in the middle of the floor and kicking the air with her stockinged feet. "Where's her pretty new shoes?"

"I wo—won't have 'em, na—nas—nasty old things! Ne—Nellie's squeaks like ev—ev'ryfing and mine don't squeak a bi—bi—bit."

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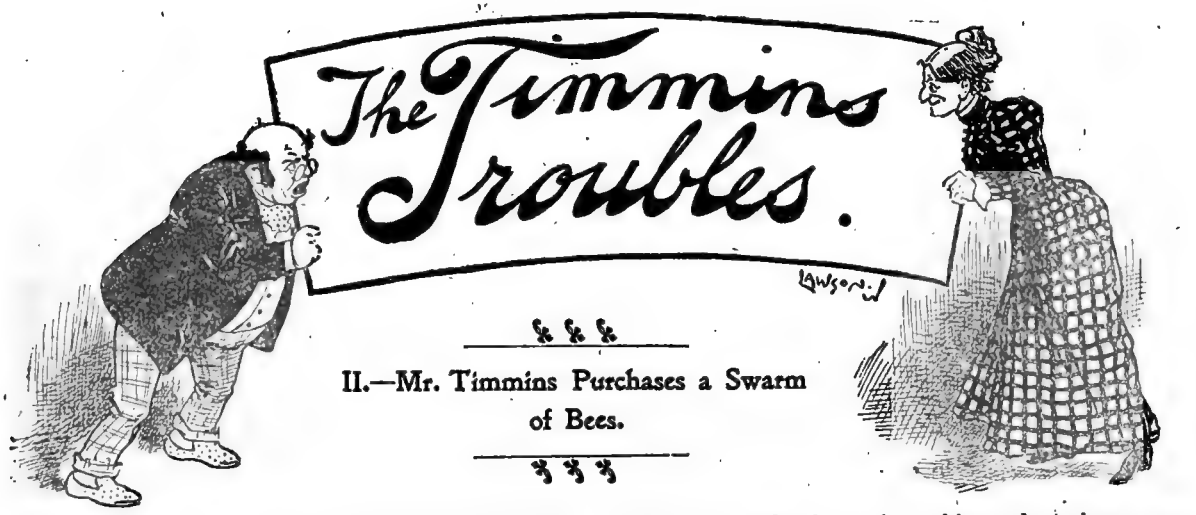

II.—Mr. Timmins Purchases a Swarm of Bees.

"I HAVE been reading up on the culture of bees for the past month, and have come to the conclusion that it would be economical to keep a few, rather than continue to buy our honey," said Mr. Timmins as he laid aside his paper.

"That would be perfectly grand. Can you buy some?" Mrs. Timmins inquired.

"Yes, Anna, I have already bought a swarm, and they will be delivered to-night."

"Where will you put them?" she asked.

"Under the tree in the back yard, my dear."

"Can't you put them in the shed, Henry? I am afraid they will sting if you put them so close to the house."

"Put them in the shed," he exclaimed, sneeringly. "Well, I'll be quartered. Mrs. Timmins, you are at the head of the class in the bee business. Wouldn't it be a good scheme to put them in a barrel and head it up? Or do you have an idea that they drive them in the shed at night, and tie them up as you do cows?"

"No, I don't think any such thing; but I don't want to be chased into the house every time I step out of doors by a lot of ugly bees," she replied.

"This stinging business is all fudge. The honey bee is constituted very much the same as domestic animals; they want to know their master. If you show any sign of fear, they will jump on you; but if you walk firmly up and cuff one, he will hurry into the hive and behave himself. It requires a little nerve, Mrs. Timmins—a little nerve, that's all."

The next morning they went out to see how the bees were getting on. There were a cluster of bees on the front of the hive, and Mrs. Timmins remarked that she did not believe they were satisfied with their location, or they would go into the hive.

"I know what is the trouble," said Timmins, "The man I bought them of told me that when they hung out in that way the boxes were filled with honey, and I must replace them with empty ones."

"Will you send for him to show you how?" she inquired.

"Mrs. Timmins, I don't ask anyone's advice about how to handle a bee."

"I thought perhaps you had not had them long enough to be acquainted with them," she soothingly remarked.

"It is not necessary to have an introduction and shake hands with a bee to know him, or he to know you, Mrs. Timmins. If you go sneaking round his place of business in a half-scared way, you are liable to come in contact with the sportive part of his disposition. While, on the other hand, if you walk up to the hive with an air of ownership and authority, he will step to one side and look on. I will take these six boxes and put them in the place of the ones filled with honey."

He walked up behind the tree, reached round, and removed the top of the hive. About a pint of bees came dashing out, and one of them alighted on his neck, which caused him to drop his boxes and claw him off.

"There, my fine fellow, I think you will mind your own affairs next time," he remarked.

The next instant one struck him under the eye, while another was trying to drive his harpoon through his ear, and a third was drilling a shaft through his cheek.

"Look out for yourself," he yelled to Mrs. Timmins, at the same time striking at the bees with his fist and hat.

"Oh, Moses!" he ejaculated, as he slapped his thigh. "Take that, you humming, howling maniac!" he roared "Great guns! They are crawling up inside my trouser legs! Bring me the broom! make a fire! set the house on fire! I must have some smoke, or I am a dead man," he cried.

He slapped his legs with his hand, and pounded his head with his hat, and in that way he fought his way from the hive to the kitchen door, when Bridget came out, and a bee stung her on the nose. She grasped her nose with both hands and ran, yelling.

"Did any of them sting you, Henry?" asked Mrs. Timmins, as she put her head in at the kitchen door.

He rose to his feet and faced her. His left eye was entirely closed, and his right ear hung down almost to his shoulder, while his face and neck were covered with various sized protuberances.

"Why, Timmins, what a sight you are! Sit down in this chair while I bathe your face in salt and water."

"This is another of your ingenious jobs, Mrs. Timmins. If you never eat any honey until I gather it for you, it will taste good when you get it," he groaned, as he sat down in the chair.

"You did not impress the bees with your air of ownership and authority, Henry," she said, as she patted his swollen eye with the wet cloth.

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A drop of the brine splattered into the eye that was open. He groaned as he pushed his wife on one side, and rubbed his eye with his shirt-sleeve.

"That's right, Mrs. Timmins, put the other eye out; then you can run me into any of your traps! As a blind man my days would be numbered," he growled.

Bridget came downstairs with a nose that strongly resembled a vegetable marrow, with the stem fastened on her face. Squaring herself before Timmins, and pointing towards her nose, she said:

"Do ye see that, ye imp of consate and villainy? Do you notice the shape ye've got on me illigant nose—the pride of Mike's heart? Do you see it? And it's his night to call, so it is! Och, murther, I'm undone! But if the shape of that nose breaks off the match between us, I'll have the law on ye before the sun goes down to-morrow! Do ye moind that?"

A ghastly smile crept over Mr. Timmins' irregular features, and he tried to give an expression to his crippled eye, but did not succeed.

"Yes, Bridget," he replied, "I can see it: and, although my eyesight is very much impaired, I think, with the sky for a background, I could see that nose nine hundred miles away. In other words it is a prominent feature, and denotes great strength of character; and when you lay it across Mike's shoulder, while you whisper your vows of eternal constancy in his ear, he will see mirrored in its glossy surface the future happiness of your wedded life; and then he will bless the little bee that in a sportive moment toyed with your dainty nose."

"If it wasn't for the blindness av ye, I would break yer head with the fire-shovel, you long-eared murtherer. Sure, if I had an ear like that on me head, I could hear the chirp of a cricket two miles off." And she indignantly swept out of the room.

"Anna, I forgive you for getting me into this scrape. I am amply avenged. The sight of that nose repays me for all my suffering," said Timmins, as he rose from his chair and tottered to the bedroom to lie down.

"And your husband fell from the Eiffel Tower?"

"Yes. How I wish it had been taller!"

"Monster! You rejoice at his death?"

"Sir, you insult me! I wanted him to live longer."

"The doctor would like to see you inside," said the maid to the caller in the reception room.

"Not if I know it," said the startled patient. "He can't try an X-ray on me."

"There is some comfort in being the father of twins," said the unhappy-looking passenger, to which the fat passenger, being there for that purpose, inquired, "What?"

"They keep each other awake of nights as well as my wife and me."

Mrs. Wicklins: "You and your husband and Mr. and Mrs. Caddsley seem to be good friends."

Mrs. Dimpleton: "Yes. You see, Mr. Caddsley and I used to be engaged."

Mrs. Wicklins: "But I don't understand why that fact should make you enjoy each other's society now?"

Mrs. Dimpleton: "Well, of course, I can't speak for him, but he married a woman who is at least five years older than I am and not half as good looking, if I do say it myself. You don't know what a comfortable feeling takes possession of me when we are together and I see him glancing first in her direction and then in mine."

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This week the Editor of SHORT STORIES addresses 100 envelopes to 100 people in various parts of the country. Inside each envelope he places a sovereign and locks them away in his private safe.

SIMPLY TAKE A POST-CARD

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Result of Distribution No. 9.

Four of the fifty sovereigns offered have this week been claimed by:

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J. T. McBride, Lift Attendant, Central Buildings, Liverpool; Mrs. F. Fenning, 75 Lady Margaret Road, N.W.; G. Stokes, 36 Fitzroy Square, W.; J. Young, 24 Marshall Place, Perth; W. L. Lemon, Uffculme, Devon; G. F. Matthews, 20 West Street, Chichester; W. A. Smith, 33 York Terrace, Leigh, Lancashire; J. D. Lister, 105 Noel Street, Nottingham; H. Owen, 32 High Street, Wimbledon; F. Jones, Sutton Weaves, near Warrington; Miss B. G. Jeffrey, 4 Albert Terrace, St. Edmund's, Church Street, Salisbury; J. M. Bradley, Church Street, Wulmslow, Cheshire; H. Larkin, 7 St. Jone Street, Lichfield; J. Jonas, 1 Mill Street, Hanley; W. H. Cleaver, 19 Garfield Street, Kettering; A. F. Smith, Pear Tree, Newchurch, Isle of Wight; A. Nash, Confectioner, Milford, Surrey; W. Kinch, Worthington Lodge, Worthington, Wigan; R. Jenkins, John Street, Porthcawl; E. Lawrence, 4 Mount Pleasant, Chepstow; James Walker, Selkirk Street, Hamilton; J. Rance, Queen's Road, Great Marlow; Mrs. Downing, Fair View, Pedmore, Worcestershire; Mrs. Robson, Grove Hill, Kelso; J. W. Vickers, Wentworth House, Craven Road, Newbury, Berks; W. J. Nagle, 17 North Street, Skibbereen; R. J. Ussher. J.P., Cappagh, Lismore R.S.O., Co. Waterford; James O'Brien, New Street, Church Gresley; Alfred Lygo, 6 Gold Street, Leicester; James Marshall, Ferndale, Cherry Hinton; James Grice, Leicester Villas, Sheringham, Norfolk; Mrs. Hatch, Ranmark House, Ranelagh Road, Felixstowe; W. Treble, East Street, Okehampton, Devon; H. Phillips, Castle Street, Liskeard; Chas. Santer, The Bridge, Cranbrook, Kent; J. S. Rattenbury, 4 Dockyard Terrace, Sheerness; H. T. Winter, Brockhampton, Herefordshire; Mrs. Valentine, 41 Broad Street, Ludlow; J. A. York, Horse Market, Barnard Castle; F. Park, Gloster View, Warkworth; E. Unrah, 3 Petterill Street, Carlisle; J. Thompson, Station Road, Kirkby Stephen; W. King, Linwood Road, Market Rasen; A. M. Macgregor, 7 Westbourne Terrace Road, W.; A. F. Woodward, 54 Mill Street, Liverpool; Mrs. Gifford, 41 Hockliffe Road, Leighton Buzzard.

JUMBLE STORY.] # BE LACK OF IT. [FOR CONDITIONS SEE PAGE 864.

I was seated by my fireside one afternoon, just as Fritz was crouching in the opposite corner, his intended enjoyment of the evening.

I do not mind confessing that had I not known that about his private affairs, but he had not mentioned about the telephone and various others of our everybody?"

I turned with a shudder and saw him with a long thoroughfare in the German city of Leipzig. He forgot, momentarily, my fear in the contemplation of evening. It was very cold and windy; snowflakes muttering wild words in a disjointed fashion. I felt that he would use violence if I persisted and he consequently did not reveal anything; had he really ——"

"Yes, suddenly, three hours ago," he went on feverglaring at the figure of Elsie; I felt that Fritz was written in his own language the word "friend" came from my dry throat.

He gripped my arm so vigorously that he hurt me. I envied my friend his good fortune—a bewitching tube and a mouthpiece; at the end of the tube was eyes fixed upon the form on the couch.

"But, my dear fellow, the thing is an utter friend of his. The letter was written in English—feverishly busy; then I saw—*did* I see it?—the impossibility!" I exclaimed in amazement.

"Yes," he continued—more to himself than to me, the young lady was betrothed, I should have fallen if I could, and he would introduce me to a particular wife, Fräulein Elsie Giessen."

Three months passed away and, although I saw him I shrank instinctively from him. "I cannot!" he usually wrote to me in my own tongue—and there came another ring more impatient than the strange ideas that in my own mind I looked upon again. I secretly believed that he had made the strange light, there were traces of tears on his hands.

"I am quite prepared to hear that," he retorted. As I look back on what followed, I shudder. I do it to you now. I hope to improve upon my process in that case? Why not do this—this—I don't know that there *might* be something in it."

I will let her go from me like that? But I cannot say, half-a-dozen hours from the moment that the daylight was fading, staring into the fire and arose and glanced round me. The form of Elsie was a doctor with a good practice; we had known gas which he had made according to a method dis-ishly. "I am going to try it. Come with me, I was a long way behind my friend. He had such cheeks. He entered the hall and shut the door to hundreds of miles away—to give only one instance?"

"Ugh!" I groaned, as there came a violent pull at first. I went to the door and opened it. I started day appliances," he remarked coolly. "Why should I hold advanced notions on scientific subjects, but I would not stay!"

"Yet, I certainly did half expect that you—who believe the theory to be perfectly practicable."

"Dead!" I echoed.

I did my best to conceal my surprise, for this announcement was unexpected; Fritz told me much and a feeling of depression was upon me.

We were seated in my friend's study in a prominent wondering whether I should be called out that room. "Allow me to introduce you to my affianced charming woman that I have ever met. I secretly lay on the couch; but the position was different! "Come in, Horace!" he cried, shaking me heartily shortly afterwards.

"Fritz," I cried, "what is wrong?"

"That is what our grandmothers would have said not exactly know what really did occur. I was deathly pale, his eyes were staring and filled with a no second glance to tell me that she was dead. I uttered a shriek of fear and fell senseless.

"I brought you back," he muttered. "But you have such advanced views concerning the capabilities of science—would at least have admitted each other for about seven years—that is, when he did, I put on my hat and overcoat and followed him. "How can I? The thing is——" I stopped.

"You must—you shall!" he hissed. "Do you think what your process is—before the breath leaves the bosom heave regularly. It was too much! I want your assistance!"

Only those words, over and over again. He was in love with her myself; for she was the most present, having got over my fit of envy very quickly; because I did not wish to intrude upon his happiness.

"Nonsense!" he returned quietly. "I say again, *I* came to London to finish his studies—for he was a wife and a splendid practice—and I missed the test and failed.

One day I received a note from Fritz, asking me to a ball of rubber which, I concluded, contained the German, whereas I am English.

My housekeeper did not answer the summons and the bell, "It sounds urgent."

"Quick, help me with this!"

When I came to myself, I heard the voice of Fritz some day so that it will be as effective as you say. back in dismay.

"Oh, but your notion is altogether absurd. I call and spend an hour or so with him that evening, covered by himself. I held the ball with trembling keep out the wind and snow ere he replied.

Yes, she lay motionless on the couch and it needed very frequently, the subject was never broached but I kept away from his home as much as possible My friend stood in the doorway. His face was do it alone and you are the only one who can help him as a "crank."

But I shall test my theory at the first opportunity." me!"

"I believe it to be quite possible to restore a dead her beauty. I was recalled to myself by Fritz.

"She is dead—Elsie!" he said hoarsely.

"But," I objected, "why should a person die at all by the hand as the servant ushered me into a cosy was far stronger than I. Scarce knowing what I would have prepared me for what was coming.

The conversation was then changed, and I left him my idea be more impossible than speaking to people were being driven this way and that by fierce squalls, person to life, if the case be taken in hand within, person expires."

"Because it is necessary. I shall not stop to explain this.

The marriage took place a month later and I was mad!

L. E. GIGNEN.

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Sandy Carmichael.

By CUTCLIFFE HYNE.
Author of "The Adventures of Captain Kettle," etc., etc.

BOOK I.

CONCERNING THE FLIGHT - - - - - - FROM CULLODEN MOOR.

CHAPTER I.

How two Englishmen came to Lochaber: and how they stole and ate black-faced mutton.

THE modern road which leads from Fort William in Inverness-shire to the only two land-tracks which can take one south, runs for the first seven miles or so of its length within stone's-throw of the rocky margin of Loch Aber, or, as it is sometimes called, Upper Loch Linnhe. It is easy to see that pains have been taken to build this road. In some places it is delved from the hill-side; in others, it is laboriously built up, stone upon stone, from the waters of the salt-water fjord below. The road is moderately well kept—that is, small stones are placed in the ruts and holes when they appear, and in the course of time the traffic rolls them down to the normal level; and though "level" is a word hardly applicable to a track which is undulating as a stretch of stormy ocean, level it is on the whole, for none of its many gradients mount to more than twenty yards in height. In fact, it is a road which is very creditable to the region it passes through, considering the very slender amount of traffic which patronises it.

Now this road is distinctly modern. Our ancestors could engineer their roads equally well if they tried—as witness that quaint zigzag yclept, the Devil's Staircase, which connects Glencoe with Kinloch, in the same neighbourhood. But they did not often take these pains over their thoroughfares, and even when the pathway was in any degree elaborate, one trait connected it with the more slenderly kempt tracks. In one and all there was a contempt shown for gradient that was little short of the superb. Wherever there is a hillock, the road is bound to go over it. One would think that the original tracers of the Scotch mountain roads absolutely gloried in crowding them with as many steep places as possible.

It was not till long after "the '45," and the old patriarchal style of clan government had died out, that English money began to flow in and recruit the country's supplies, and the old barbaric civilisation began to be replaced by a civilisation which, if a trifle more effeminate, was at the same time vastly more replete with bodily comfort both for man and beast.

This being so, it need not surprise one to learn that in the year of grace 1745, the south road from Fort William led in an arbitrarily crooked line across the hills, and joined the present one just before one comes to Cuilchenna.

To an eye trained in the niceties of Macadam, the term road would have appeared to be merely a courtesy title. There had been no pick and shovel work done upon it; no powder had been applied to the many outcrops of mother-rock which thrust their sturdy shoulders through the surface; no hammer had attacked even the larger of the boulders. The prevailing shape of the stones upon the road was more or less spherical; and if any showed traces of having been cubes, it was evident that the angles were being rapidly rubbed off them. In fact, a track had originally been made first by men, and then by men and horses, crossing the hills on the same route. Their treadings had worn away grass, heather, and gorse. The peat below became loosened. The constant drizzles and the frequent rains had washed away the loose surface soil. And so, by a simple subtraction, it is easy to see that in time little else but loose and semi-rounded stones would be left.

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Thus it appeared when, on April 20th, 1745, a couple of travellers topped the last rise, and advanced slowly downwards. One, the elder, sat, or rather crouched, upon a jaded horse, which stumbled laboriously amongst the boulders. The other, a big-framed man of about four-and-twenty, with a three days' growth of black beard over his face, led the horse with one hand, and supported his companion in the saddle with the other. He seemed wearied almost to death, and his high riding-boots and lace-bedizened red coat were stained and splashed till the original colour of each was scarcely anywhere visible. But he was to all appearance still sound in wind and limb. The rider, on the other hand, was obviously wounded; for though no outward bandage caught the spectator's eye, the paleness and limpness of the man told of a grievous hurt somewhere.

A small puff of wind came as they passed the entrance of a tiny gully, and the rider's hat rolled off to the ground, and its owner showed a disposition to follow it. His left knee bent, and his body swayed heavily to the off-side. The younger man caught him by the belt, and steadying him back into the saddle, said, in a voice that had in it a pitiful attempt at cheeriness:

"Now, Major, pull yourself together. We haven't much further to go. The way should be tolerably safe. They are all Lochiel's people hereabouts, and won't lay a finger on us when they know who we are."

The younger man caught him by the belt.

The wounded man answered with painful effort:

"You're a good lad — the — the best. But it's no use. I'm smashed all to pieces—inside me. That spill, when my horse came down this morning, made it worse. The ribs are sticking into me like hot skewers: and I'm bleeding, lad, bleeding internally; I can feel it stream out every time I catch a breath—so."

"Don't you scare yourself, Major. You're worth a dozen dead men yet. Of course, you are hurt. Who wouldn't be, after having had a horse pounded into his ribs by a cannon-ball? But remember that, thanks to that butcher Cumberland, you've had a hundred-mile ride at smart pace. Why, I'm pretty nearly as done up as you are, myself; and I haven't got a scratch on me."

"I tell you, Sneyd, I shall be a dead man in twelve hours or less. Remember I've been hurt before, and, one way and another, have learnt enough surgery to know that what I say is true. I don't mind dying. The Cause is lost now—muddled away—ruined because twenty leaders wouldn't pocket their pride and name a chief. I'd be outlawed if I went back to Cheshire, and kick up a host of trouble. But, if they don't see me again, they'll maybe let the poor wife and children alone to enjoy what I have provided for them. So I'd rather die here. The torture of moving is getting more than a man can bear. I should be easier sitting on that heather."

"I'll help you down if you like, Major," replied Sneyd half sullenly, "but may I be hanged if I leave you!"

"You'll be hanged if you don't go on," retorted the other, with a feeble smile. "They shot every one they could lay their hands on at Culloden Moor, but even Cumberland couldn't make them savages enough to do that now. No, you'll be taken away and tried, and hanged like a sheep-stealer by the common executioner, as an edifying example to your neighbours. Not much delay either. There are certain to be some of 'em close on our heels."

"Then," said Sneyd doggedly, "I'll swing. Wait a minute, Major, till there's some of this heather-stuff cut, and then I'll help you off the horse. He, poor beast, looks as sorry as either of us, but he'll be in better plight in the long run, for he's certain to be turned into an officer's stable. I'm glad of it. He's carried me bravely ever since I joined the Prince's colours at Manchester, on that Saturday morning when you presented me to the first Royal person I'd ever seen."

"I'm afraid it's an ill turn I did you then, lad. Had I known as much as I do now, we'd both of us be snugly at home. However, that can't be mended, and, as it was, you did your duty as the son of a soldier like your father should do it. Still, I am superior officer yet, and you must obey orders. Leave me here, and go and save your own skin."

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"I've obeyed every order yet, Major, but I'm going to mutiny now. Leave you I won't, and that flat."

"Then, Sneyd, I shall just go on till I tumble."

"Major, look here, we'll compromise matters. D'ye see that little glen over the shoulder yonder? If you can sit the horse till we get there, I'll set you down, and build some sort of a shelter over you. We shall be out of sight of the road there, and when you've rested a bit, we'll make further up into the hills, for you to recruit thoroughly."

Sneyd wheeled the tired horse off the road to the right, and led it across the rough moorland. The going was bad enough, and sometimes the poor beast got bogged almost up to the girths. The heather was rank and strong; the bog-myrtle bushes were many of them four feet high: the peat-hogs were plentiful; the ground was treacherous in the extreme; but Sneyd strode stolidly along, noticing not the black game nor the grouse that he flushed; seeing nothing, hearing nothing, being intent only on bringing his charges to the goal he had pointed out.

When at last they reached it, the gully showed itself deeper than had been anticipated. The elder man had almost lost consciousness. To carry him further would be to kill him. Nothing but an iron will had sustained him thus far. Besides, Sneyd's horse, which his companion was riding, had hardly a leg to stand on, and was holding down its head in most sorry fashion. And so, although the bleak north-easter was cutting up the gully with remorseless chill, and though everything gleamed and glistened with the wet, there was nothing for it but to camp where they were and make the best of it.

Accordingly, the cornet cut a few armfuls of heather, and after laying his companion down on it as comfortably as he was able, set about building a wall on either side of him.

There were stones in plenty, for the small burn which ran down the gully was a most efficient quarryman, and though they were not squared with a mason's niceness, Sneyd's nimble hands puzzled them into position. He built three walls this fashion: and then, raftering them with a few leafless branches of mountain birch, roofed in his hut with heather, turf, and stones.

Night had far advanced before this labour was completed, and, judging that no enemy would be moving about in the darkness, he ventured to get out his flint and steel and light a fire with the branches of a dead birch close at hand. The Major had been dozing for some time; and so, despite his great weariness, Sneyd went off without remark to forage for a meal. He was conscious of having seen fair-sized birds on the hillside, and though, being a south country Englishman, he did not know them to be grouse and black game, he supposed, from their short flight, that they would be easily caught after nightfall. Birds he did indeed find in plenty, for the country abounded with them then more than it does now; but not so much as a feather of one of them could he touch. It is a curious fact that the grouse, although they will not stir for sheep or cattle during the night, are immediately aware of the presence of a man, and call to one another warnings that every poacher knows full well.

His utter weariness prevented Sneyd's quest being a long one. His knees began to totter under him, and he felt that before many more minutes had passed, his legs would refuse their duties altogether. And so he was wending his way slowly back towards the hut, when of a sudden he stumbled upon a sheep sleeping amongst the heather. The animal started to its fore knees, and ducked its head to rise; but Sneyd was too quick for it. He fell across its fleecy back, and forcing it to the ground, opened his clasp-knife, and performed the office of executioner. From sheer inexperience, he did this clumsily; but at last the animal's struggles ceased, and its captor summoned up his remaining powers to drag or carry it to the hut.

The task proved overmuch for him. The ground was too uneven to trail any considerable weight over, and being ignorant of the knack, he could not in his then state progress with the carcass on his shoulders. So, sitting down once more, he took out his pocket-knife again, and started to hack off a leg.

The moon peeped down occasionally at him through a cranny in the tearing clouds overhead, but darkness for the most part prevailed, and his work got on but slowly. The thick fleece, which it had not dawned upon him to skin away, impeded his efforts; and his blunt weapon made but little impression on the mountain sheep's thews and sinews. He had never been a butcher before, and, being city bred, had but little knowledge of butchery. Hence the bone impeded his efforts vastly, for the locality of a joint was unknown to him. So he satisfied himself with cutting off as many lumps of flesh as seemed sufficient to him, and then, staggering to his feet again, all covered with blood, and filthy with brown bog-earth, he made for the hut.

The fire, ill-made, had burnt itself well-nigh out, and after satisfying himself that the wounded man was still dozing, Sneyd set to work coaxing it into a blaze again.

The wood was damp, and as the Scotch mist drizzled heavily, the flame did not spring up rapidly; but at last it spurted out here and there, and he set to cooking his mutton. Being his first essay of the kind, he had small notion of how to set to work; and after toasting the raw flesh on a pointed stick for some time without arriving at any result, he threw the whole bodily on the embers.

Conceiving after a time that, by the look of it, his roast was cooked, he woke the Major, and giving him a lump of the mutton, took another himself. The elder man uttered his thanks, and attempted to eat, but could contrive to swallow very little. The meal was certainly not tempting. It consisted of smoky charred meat and smoky raw meat, with scarcely so much as a trace of the intermediate stage between the two. But Sneyd ate a couple of pounds voraciously, and then, having satisfied himself that his companion's couch was as comfortable as circumstances permitted of, laid himself down and fell fast asleep.

Without, the rain drove down and hissed on the fire; a melancholy wild cat howled; and the high falls of the Ree burn, heavy with spate water, boomed in the near distance. The ground they lay on was spongy with moisture; their clothes were soaked through and through with mud and water; but exhaustion claimed her own, and the young and sound soldier, and the old and wounded one, slept on till the sun had risen high above snow-capped Ben Nevis, and the April morning had warmed to almost summer's heat.

CHAPTER II.

How two fugitives kept house in Lochaber; how Murtagh O'Neill appeared and was received; how the household was again reduced to two; and how these two were evicted by a troop of heavy cavalry.

The morning of the twenty-first of April was, as I have said, well advanced when Sneyd awoke. He found the Major lying beside him in a fitful doze, and noted that his wound had brought on a pretty tolerable fever. Like himself, the invalid must be soaked through to the bone. The rain had turned the floor of their hut into a spongy morass. A hand pressed upon it was covered almost instantly with muddy brown water. An old campaigner would have anticipated this, and have taken measures to avoid it; but Sneyd was young, and had to purchase his experience. However, he was blessed with a goodly store of common-sense, and so, lifting the Major up in his sturdy arms, he carried him outside, and laid him on a springy bed of dry heather in the warm sunshine. Then, returning, he floored the dwelling with stones, and carpeted it with a thick layer of heather. Moss and mud filled the chinks in the hastily-built walls, and by midday the habitation was tolerably snug.

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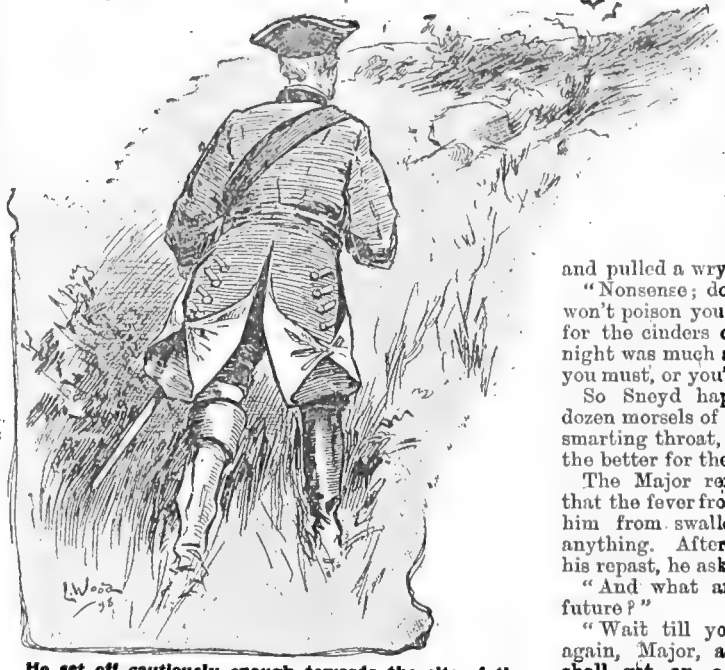
Another meal was the next consideration, and how to obtain this he did not exactly know. If any of the troops of his angry majesty, King George II. met him on the prowl for provisions, he was quite aware that they would shoot him down with as little compunction as a keeper would slaughter a stoat or a weasel. The lesson of Culloden Moor, so thought the English king's advisers, could not be burnt too deeply home. And, even had he been prepared to encounter the risk himself, a glance at his helpless companion determined him to be wary. Still, food they must have, for starvation was quite as remorseless a foe as George of Brunswick. Away amongst the hills he would, of course, be safe. One might wander on them for weeks without meeting a living soul. But then, unfortunately, they were more or less barren ground for foraging purposes. They produced no bread, nor potatoes, nor even oatcake; and of the game that lived on them—the red deer and the roebuck, the grouse and the black game, the blue hare and the rabbit—he had as much notion of capturing as he had of catching elephants. With his pistols he could scarcely hit a man at half-a-dozen yards, and a snare was utterly beyond his ingenuity. Add to this, he was feeling knocked up. He woke up tired, and grew more weary as the day wore on; he had a bad cold in the head, and a painful sore throat. Indeed, had he been at home, he would have gone to bed straight away.

But here there was no such thing as bed, or even lying down to rest, to be thought of. Aching bones can receive but little consideration when an empty stomach and a trembling neck claim any marked attention.

So Lawrence Sneyd pondered on the victualling question anew.

Wild fruit he could not expect to meet with at that time of year—even if wild fruit ever grew in the neighbourhood, which he doubted; for the cold, inclement spring air had given him a poor opinion of Scotland as a producer of any of the plants he knew in England. At last, however, he remembered the sheep of overnight. It would not do to take—or, to put it more bluntly, steal—sheep as a regular thing, for sheep usually have an owner, and the said owner is not, as a rule, favourably disposed towards sheep-lifters, whether biped or quadruped. But the particular sheep in question was dead, and to bring home the remains of the mangled carcass would not add to the risk he had already run. So he set off cautiously enough towards the site of the midnight execution, and finding it after some trouble—for it is not given to a raw Englishman to trace his tracks over a Scotch hill without many futile essays—by the omen of a dozen grey-backed carrion crows rising leisurely from a spot that was exactly a gunshot away from him.

He walked up, and saw before him a spectacle that was the reverse of savoury. In the midst of a small patch of open ground, which was trampled into a slough of blood and brown peat slime, lay the draggled remains of the sheep. The feathered scavengers had made the most of their opportunity. Fully one half of what Sneyd had left was carried off. And the much mangled remainder looked far from tempting. But desperate men cannot afford to be dainty or fastidious; and, getting out his knife again, he skinned the carcass this time, eviscerated it, and wrapping what was left in the pelt, shouldered his bundle, and carried it back.



He set off cautiously enough towards the site of the midnight execution.

When he returned, his companion was awake.

"Can I do anything for you?" Sneyd asked.

"Thanks, good lad, no. With this fever on me, water is all I want; and water is close to hand. You've got some more mutton there, I see. Are you going to light another fire?"

"Too dangerous now, Major. We're close to the road, and I saw a patrol pass down it not an hour since."

"But you are very hungry?"

"Dreadfully."

"Then eat the meat raw."

Sneyd shuddered, and pulled a wry face.

"Nonsense; don't be squeamish. It won't poison you. And, besides, saving for the cinders outside, that stuff last night was much as this is. Anyway, eat you must, or you'll break down."

So Sneyd happened to get half-a-dozen morsels of the raw flesh down his smarting throat, and felt and looked all the better for the dose.

The Major refused a share, saying that the fever from his wound prevented him from swallowing a mouthful of anything. After the other had finished his repast, he asked him:

"And what are your plans for the future?"

"Wait till you get on your legs again, Major, and then we'll see. I shall get an adept at this kind of savage's life in a day or two, and shall be able to look after you better. Then, when you've a little strength, we'll move further up into the hills to recruit fully. By that time any pursuit they may have set up will have slackened, and we can move more at our leisure."

The wounded man smiled sadly. "Don't try to deceive yourself or me," he said. "I shall not get over this. All the doctors in the universe could not pull me through. The comforts of my own home could not prolong my life by more than a few hours. The pain is not nearly so acute as it was——"

"There!" exclaimed Sneyd, "you are feeling better already. What else can it mean?"

"Mortification, lad, mortification. Nothing else would deaden it. Now listen. We have ridden right athwart Scotland, by Loch Ness, Loch Oich, and Loch Lochy, because I judged that, being the most unlikely way for fugitives to take, the Elector's men would not guard it with any very scrupulous care. However, the bad luck that

He held him by the throat with one hand, and drew a long, murderous-looking dirk with the other.

banned the Cause, seemed to have stuck to its unfortunate supporters. Four scrimmages did we have on the road, from each escaping by the bare skin of the teeth through your strength and courage; for, as a weak and wounded man, I was able to raise but a nerveless hand in our mutual defence.

"Now, mind, ours was no wild-goose retreat—or flight, if you choose to call it by its proper name. There was a runner current in the army that the Prince's ship *La Doubtelle* was still lying in one of these narrow lochs; and I satisfied myself that the rumour was not without foundation. He landed close here, from Loch-na-Nuagh in the Hebrides, with Sir Thomas Sheridan, the Marquis of Tullibardine, and the rest of them; and the privateer hoisted in her boats and left them, nominally sailing back for France. But she is said not to have gone. If she is still at her anchor near at hand you will be able to find out the exact locality and join her. The fishermen hereabouts are all well affected to our cause, and will aid you by every means in their power. If, on the other hand, she has left these seas, why, then you must get aboard some other craft. France would be a safe haven for you—France, or almost any part of the continent; and there is always some war going on, where a good sword is well paid for. Or, if you don't like the idea of becoming a soldier of fortune, well, try your luck in the colonies across the Atlantic. Once there, no questions are asked. You pitch upon a plot of land—so I've been told—plant your tobacco, or whatever it may be, have slaves to wait on you, do a little fighting with the Indians every now and then, and on the whole live like a gentleman. There, now, give me another drink of water, and let me have a doze."

That the Major was dying, Sneyd could no longer disguise from himself. The old soldier's once round and ruddy face was white and shrunken, his arm was weak and nerveless, his voice was low and tremulous. His mind alone seemed unimpaired; and, between the intervals of rest, he gave the younger man much shrewd advice for his future guidance.

With such talk as this, during his waking intervals, the elder man spent the day; and the younger, very sick at heart, tended him with every available care, but added little to the conversation. Sneyd was fond of his companion. He had been his "father in arms," and his close friend and comrade throughout the short campaign. Death he was not unaccustomed to. It had been brought closely under his notice in more than one of its always grim forms; he had seen the camp-fire comrade, the billet companion, of one night, lying stark and stiff in his boots the next morning; but to watch this close friend passing away by inches before his very eyes, was a new and bitter experience to him: and he liked it little enough.

Night fell, and when the hours had passed on till no one was likely to be on the road, Sneyd lit a fire once more, and made a more scientific essay at cooking. The result was by no means perfect, but it was better than his last attempt. Still, it was not sufficiently alluring to tempt the Major. He was out of pain now; he had little sensation in any part of his body; and, though retaining all his mental faculties, was so weak that he could scarcely give his thoughts and wishes utterance. Clearly, the end was not far off now. Sneyd saw this, and asked as delicately as he could for any last message or commission.

"I may perchance get through, Major," he said; "and if I do, I'll manage to communicate with your folks at home, if it's possible to do so."

"You are a kind, good lad, but there is no need for you to burden yourself. I left all my affairs in order before I set off. It can do my poor wife and chicks no good to hear when or how I shuffled off this mortal coil; and, if the news got spread abroad, it might do them an immensity of harm. If nothing is said to bring my name into prominent notice, the Elector's people may deem it policy to let matters alone, and stir up no more bad blood. But if, on the other hand, our tale of the last few days was published, they might well style me rebel, attaint me of high treason, confiscate the estate, and turn widow and orphans adrift on a world which would have no sympathy with their misfortunes. So credit yourself with a generous thought and offer, and leave ill alone."

The night wore on, and the wounded man sank by visible degrees. The fire kept burning low, too, as if in harmony with his thread of life; and Sneyd, utterly careless now of who the blaze might bring to their hiding-place, heaped on fuel till the rude hovel was filled with a glare of tawny light. Wood was not abundant. The nearest copse was across the burn, a mile and a half away. But there were stunted half-dead birches sprouting up here and there through the heather, and from these the watcher culled an armful of branches as he wanted them.

On one of these expeditions for fuel, having exhausted the supply in the immediate neighbourhood, he wandered further afield, passing over a spur of the hill, and gaining a hollow that was out of sight of the hut. Black clouds were driving across the sky, and night was so dark that one could just see, and no more. The scene was wild and stormy, and suited to his feelings. He plunged on through the old heather bushes and other rank growth of the moor, slopped through slimy peat-hags, splashed through icy burns, pressing on at a jog-trot, and now and again tripping and falling headlong. The hard exertion tended to deaden his thought.

He discovered one sapling, wrenched branches from it, and was moving towards another close at hand, when his feet stumbled against something soft, lying prone amongst the heather, and he was within an ace of coming down again. For the moment he supposed it was a sheep he had encountered; but when a pair of arms grasped his booted legs, and dashed him rudely to the ground, his senses awoke to the situation.

To grapple with the man was the natural instinct of the moment; and the two of them rolled over and over, crashing this way and that amongst the heather. Sneyd himself was muscular far beyond the average strong man, but his antagonist seemed to possess thews of iron and muscles of copper. Neither spoke, but their breaths came in hot, hissing gasps into each other's faces, and they strove and wrestled for the mastery with the fierceness of desperate men, who think either to kill or be killed.

For long they writhed and struggled, neither gaining more than a momentary advantage; and then Sneyd made a mistake. He loosened one hand, and, drawing it back, drove his clenched fist with full force into his adversary's

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face. He might as well have hit at a boulder of granite. The skin slid from his knuckles, but the man did not so much as wince. Instead, he threw Sneyd with a mighty effort back downwards on the ground. Then, kneeling upon his chest, he held him by the throat with one hand, and drew a long, murderous-looking dirk with the other.

"Cumberland's butcher," he said.

"Cumberland's butcher yourself," retorted the Englishman.

"Ye're English, ye dog! Don't be afther denying it!" cried he who held the upper hand.

"English I am."

"And in the Elector's service?"

"I am Cornet Laurence Sneyd, of Sheridan's Horse."

"Ach!" said the other, "then, if that's the case, I'm sorry for maltreating yez. But for why didn't yez speak out before?"

"You didn't give me a chance," replied Sneyd, scrambling to his feet as the other released him. "And who, may I ask, are you?"

"Murtagh O'Neill, at yer honour's sarvice. Fled from that murtherin' place near Inverness, an' making for County Fermanagh like a cock in the autumn. I've thramped it ivery bit of the way, an' 'tis mortial tired of the game I am. Savin' for a dummy* bhoy that gave me a drink of potcheen fornenst the ould castle yonder, there isn't a sowl that's spoke a civil word to me since lavin' the army. Av it's a dhrop of the hard stuff yer honour's got handy, 'tis proud I'd be to dhrink yer honour's health."

The poor fellow was so unaffectedly glad to meet a friend that, although his flippant talk jarred, Sneyd had not the heart to stop him at once; but, as they walked back to the hut, laden with a goodly store of firewood, he told him how matters lay.

"The poor gentleman!" exclaimed the Irishman. "'Tis cruel hard for him to pass away in this haythen country, with divvle a praste or a bit o' candle to help him on his journey. Sure, it's a powerful bastely place, and sorra a bit of comfort is there to get him anywhere."

By this time they had reached the hovel, and, after replenishing their fire, went inside. The wounded man was lying on his back, with closed eyes. Sneyd signed his companion to silence, and the pair of them sat down with their backs against the opposite wall. The fire without crackled and spluttered, as the warmth from glowing embers below acted upon the fresh dew-drenched fuel above; but, by degrees, as these began to heat up and char into flame, the fitful yellow tongues of light became more constant, and the hut began to glow with a tawny radiance. With a constantly eclipsing source of luminance, it is not possible to distinguish objects with any degree of accuracy. The sudden flashes are dazzling, and, when darkness supervenes, the eye is not attuned to it: but with a steady light, however feeble, one can, when accustomed to it, see a good deal.

And so when the birch-stick fire was beginning to flare up, Sneyd, whose gaze was fixed upon the Major's recumbent form, commenced to get very uneasy. The Irishman gave certainty to his fears. With a mournful cry, he exclaimed, "Oh Lor', 'tis a corpse we're sitting with!" And then, going across the hut and laying a hand on the dead man's brow, he continued, "The poor gentleman, rest his sowl, is as cowld as a trout. He's been dead this hour."

There was no gainsaying the fact, and though Sneyd had surely expected such an event, the sudden shock of it almost stunned him. He got up and looked at the calm dead face,

The cornet turned away, and the other completed the obsequies by filling in the soil.

* Deaf and dumb man.

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and then, returning to his place against the further wall, sat moodily silent.

For a while the Irishman respected his trouble, and made no attempt to intrude upon it; but then, after fidgeting uneasily for a minute or so, he inquired—

"Might I ask av yer honour knows that the soldiers are out hereaway?"

Sneyd nodded wearily.

"There's a sthrong pathrol that passed me on the road the evening back; me lyin' in a turf-quag; an' 'tis likely 'nat some of them will be after beatin' up our quarters by daybreak. Bonfires like this ain't lighted by the grouse."

"Then we shall have to clear out."

"Of course, yer honour, an' march widout tuck of dhrum. But it's the poor Major there I was thinking of. By the blessing of God, we'll bury him dacently before we go."

"You're right," said Sneyd, waking out of his mental doze, "we can do no more for him now than that. Come and let us commence at once."

They went out into the open, and choosing the centre of a little mound which lay in the circle of firelight, and seemed the driest spot in the intermediate neighbourhood, they set to work without further delay. The soil, loosened by sword-blade and dirk, yielded readily to shovelling fingers and gouging stone; and, by dint of working with might and main, in an hour's time a six-foot grave gaped before them. Then, reverently wrapping the dead man in his military cloak, they carried the body out, and lowered it down for its last sentry-go.

It was a weird sight—the two stalwart, draggled soldiers, one English, one Irish; the unsightly heap of stones, and soil, and uprooted bushes, round the black, jagged hole; the dark, mysterious moor above, and the flickering yellow fire, that cast grotesque shadows of the whole group into the waste of darkness beyond; and unconsciously its influence made itself felt upon the mourners. Neither spoke. When the body had been lowered down Sneyd muttered a scrap of silent prayer, and the Irishman crossed himself devoutly; the cornet turned away, and the other, without bidding, completed the obsequies by filling in the soil, and piling up stones as a cairn to mark the burial-place.

When all was finished, the bleak grey dawn was beginning to lighten the rugged crests of the eastern ranges. It was the coldest part of the night, and Sneyd, who had been warming himself with exercise, felt the chill intensely. He moved away to the fire, and crouched beside it. Every bone in his body ached. His head seemed ready to split. His throat was intolerably sore. His clothes were sodden through and through. The Major's death depressed him beyond words. He felt dully indifferent to life.

The Irishman was in better plight. Used to exposure from his infancy, the constant damp of the Scotch hills affected him little. The Major's death had been no especial shock to him; and the natural buoyancy of his disposition triumphed over the depressing effect of present hardship. He roasted a goodly supply of the mutton with skilful hand, ate heartily himself, and forced his companion to do likewise.

"I know yez have no heart for grub just now, yer honour, but yez should make yer stomach swallow it against its liking. We should clear out of this soon, an' it isn't me that knows where we'll get our next bite."

So Sneyd forced himself to eat; and then, at his companion's desire, lay down and slept.

O'Neill stamped out the fire, pulled out a pipe and some cake tobacco, and started smoking. The April day was fully alight now, but was cold and cheerless. Every now and again a sleet squall whistled past the opening of the hut, blotting out the landscape; and when the ground around did come into view again it was inhospitable in the extreme. The outlook, both moral and physical, so the Irishman thought, was about as gloomy as ever he had seen it. But, taking this as an additional reason for not allowing his own spirits to drop, he puffed away contentedly, and thanked his stars that at least he had tobacco.

O'Neill urged his companion to increase the pace.

His own vigil had been a long one. Few hours' sleep had visited his eyelids since that hurried flight from the fatal moor above Inverness. But the cornet of horse, in the heavy slumber of utter exhaustion on the damp heather-bed beside him, had more real need of repose, as young men always have; and so Murtagh O'Neill stolidly kept at his voluntary watch without calling for relief.

The hours stole on, and the day grew wilder. The wind hissed passed the hut like a stream of falling grain, boomed in the doorway, and screaming through the crannies, kept the moss that stuffed them in a constant tremulous flutter. Sleet gave place to snow. It was a dusky twilight by twelve o'clock. The Elector's soldiers would never go man-hunting amongst the hills in such foul weather as this. Surely there was no need to sentinel the hiding-place any longer.

O'Neill's drowsy lids strongly seconded the motion. His head drooped further and further upon his chest, erecting itself every now and again, but each time with feebler effort. His pipe still hung loosely from his teeth; but it had been stone-cold for an hour or more. In fact, the poor fellow was more than three-parts asleep.

Suddenly he sat up and knuckled his eyes into broad wakefulness. What had alarmed him he could not tell; but it was something that had sprung every sense into full action. He pocketed his pipe, and then, leaning forward on hands and knees, drew his head to the entrance of the hut. Before him was a trooper leading his horse down by the side of the burn, and looking curiously at the hut. Sleet and snow had effectually quenched the embers of the fire, and from without no one could see what lay inside the dark doorway. Besides, although the snow was melting almost as fast as it fell, as luck would have it, there was a tidy sprinkling of feathery flakes on a heather-bush that lay immediately across the threshold.

The soldier stopped and looked at the scene before him,

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and then, setting his horse in motion again, moved down the gully, and wheeling round a shoulder to the right, moved off out of sight, but apparently towards the road.

O'Neill turned towards his companion, intending to rouse him, but found he was already awake.

"Yer honour saw that blayguard?"

"Yes."

"Then we must march, widout stoppin' to say good-bye to the girls."

"Why move? He didn't see us."

"Axin' yer honour's pardon, but he did. I caught the eyes of him when he tuk a squint this way, an' am sartin he had a flying glimpse of me. But he didn't let on to that same. He's an old soldier, he is, an's not the one to shove his sconce into a wasp's nest, where's there's no honey and plenty of stings, av he knows it. He's gone back to his mates on the road. Whist! There, yez can hear the jangling of their accutriments. Howly wars! There's a throop of them at the laste, an' we'll be havin' the whole rookery about our ears in another minute. Where's yer honour's horse?"

"I haven't seen him since we came here."

"Ach, sure, he'll be down after his victuals on the lower ground. But, faith, we're best without him. We can fut it over the bog faster than a horse can thravel. Come along, yer honour, up we go. It's meself now that 'ud like to see the evictin' party, when they find the tenants have flitted, widout lavin' so much as a turf-creel to raise a trauneen of rent upon."

Moving rapidly up the gully, they had gained the head of it by this time, and were on the point of bearing up the hill to the eastward, when a shout from below told them that O'Neill's prediction had come true. The soldiers had returned in force, and one of their number had just espied the fugitives up near the sky-line.

Half-a-dozen troopers immediately unstrung their carbines and commenced a desultory fire; but the range was long and the aim was bad, and the bullets for the most part whistled past on either side or buried themselves in the flank of the hill. The officer in command saw this, and probably knowing the inaccuracy of his men's shooting of old, bade them cease firing and follow up as fast as they could.

Meanwhile the quarry of these military sportsmen had been increasing the distance rapidly. Sneyd's riding-boots, which reached to mid-thigh, were not adapted to running, and O'Neill, who was shod in shoes, could have out-distanced him easily. But the Irishman adapted his pace to the slower rate, and the two of them pressed forward at a good round trot together.

Whilst they were in the bed of the gully, where the going was only moderately bad, the horsemen gained rapidly; but when they had topped the rise, and got upon ground whose bottom of mingled morass and angular boulder was masked by a rank growth of almost primæval moor foliage, the pace of the pursuers slackened considerably. Two horses fell, and one of them rose with a badly sprung wither; and then another slipped into a peat-hag, and got bogged up to the girths. So their commander gave the order to dismount, and leaving a dozen men, under the command of a sergeant, to guard the horses, followed up the chase with the remainder of his force on foot.

"Yer honour must put yer best foot foremost," said O'Neill, casting a Parthian glance over his shoulder.

"I'm doing all I can," gasped Sneyd. "Are they gaining?"

"They're afther us a-fut, an' the odds is some of the troop will be as fleet as we are. However, a stern chase is a long one, as we used to find at say, an' they're not aboard us yet."

"Have you pistols?" Sneyd asked, after a pause.

"Divvle a wan. No weapon at all, in fact, savin' for this long knife—dirk, I think yez call it—that I thried to drive into yer honour's gizzard overnight. Are them wee barkers in yer belt charged?"

"Yes, but the wet has got at them, I fear!"

"Bad cess to the rain. No wonder these Highlandmen like their whisky nate, when there's such a power of water about. Well, yer honour has a sword, an' we must be content wid that an' the dirk if it comes to a scrimmage."

The soldiers behind had straggled out into a long string with their round-paunched sergeant puffing and blowing in the rear. Save for a half-dozen who were well ahead of their fellows, none of them seemed adepts at running; which was not much to their discredit, seeing that they were trained to fight on legs other than their own. But these six, who were perhaps less bibulous than their fellows—for the trooper of those days was usually a perambulating barrel for potent liquid—these six, I say, hung pertinaciously on the fugitives' track, and, by slow and dogged degrees, gained somewhat.

O'Neill saw this, and urged his companion to increase the pace. "If we can draw away from them for a mile or so," he said, "we shall shake them off for good."

Sneyd was nearly speechless. "Can't—go—an atom—faster," he gasped. "Can't—keep this up—much longer—nearly cooked."

The Irishman, who was trotting along with easy stride, looked glum at this, and a glance at his companion's face showed him that the words were no exaggeration. The cornet was game enough, game to his fingers' ends; but he was out of condition; fatigue had left its trace upon him; his costume ill befitted his present case; and, besides, he was no good runner at the best ofdtimes. Some men aren't; even those who are otherwise goo all-round athletes.

O'Neill's own heels were nimble enough, and, by trusting to them, he could have outpaced the whole crew, and, for the time being at any rate, have got off scot-free. But this did not suit him. He was not the man to desert a comrade at an awkward moment like the present. With him it was sink both or swim both. And so, having decided that speed would not save them, he puzzled his brain as to what strategy would do.

(To be continued.)

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THE LAST ECLIPSE.

The Story of a Cosmic Experiment.

By GEORGE C. WALLIS.

Author of "The Last King of Atlantis," "Behind the Barrier," "The Winning of Gunhild," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

"GIVE ME TWENTY-FOUR HOURS."

"THAT is a project to which I have already given attention, and though I have reason to believe that it is possible, I am not in a position to-night to answer without doubt. Give me twenty-four hours, gentlemen, and I will give you my answer—yes or no. For the sake of science I consent to my friend's terms. Here, to-morrow night, I will tell you—yes or no."

A wave of surprise, of incredulity, of half-pity, swept over the faces of the members of the Röntgen Club in conclave assembled, on the evening of February 26th, 1915. Bishop Hearty, who had been breaking a metaphorical lance with the speaker, smiled in conscious condescension. The American stretched out his hand to the scientist and cried:

"Agreed!"

"But understand me," continued Everett, "I accept this preposterous wager only for the sake of science, and in order to silence, once and for all, those antiquated persons who are always holding forth on man's littleness. For myself, I have no care for the 100,000 dollars which our friend Killiker is ready to risk so rashly, and in the event of winning it I shall be happy to hand it over to any charity which the Röntgen Club may decide to be most worthy."

In the event of winning it, indeed! Well might Austin Everett preface his intention with an if, for surely never before was wager suggested on such an issue.

The Röntgen Club, of which I was then a member, was a rather large society, having as its nominal object the investigation and furtherance of the well-known invisible photography, but it had already gathered to itself some of the most unconventional and daring spirits of the ultra-scientific world, and the cathode rays occupied very little of our time.

Everything was discussed in its excellently-appointed lecture room; everything was upheld, criticised, and exploded by turns, and the skeleton shadowgraphs of its members, ranged in a grim, gaunt line round the walls, frowned with changeless stolidity upon the propounding of the most extreme materialistic theories that have ever emanated from the mind of man.

Yet the club was very polyglot, and the ecclesiastic majority of mankind was fairly represented amongst its members; and between these and the compact group of anti-dogmatists, a wordy war was always being waged, which, however, was conducted with invariable good temper.

In the Röntgen Club toleration was an adamant rule, and transgression was the sure precursor of expulsion.

Austin Everett, D. Sc., was the most outspoken and unflinching of the small knot of absolute materialists we had amongst us, and as might be expected, he very often came in conflict with Hearty, our senior churchman. The two were good friends privately, but clubically—if I may coin the word—they were at daggers' point.

This evening, Everett had been showing us some wonderful experiments with a new explosive, (at least, I called it so then for want of a better term) and in his somewhat didactic manner had been holding forth on the support the experiments gave to his theory of the infinite divisibility of matter.

The object-lessons, I admit, were startling in the extreme, though at the time I did not attach to them the significance that came with later knowledge. His crowning illustration for the night was the destruction of a solid sphere of granite inside a large, hermetically-sealed glass tube from which the air was exhausted by a Sprengel mercury pump.

The granite globe was handed round before being sealed in the glass (and as Everett's friend, I know there was no deception in the trick), yet when a tiny puncture was made in the tube with a small drill, and a drop of light blue fluid, almost microscopic in its minuteness, was introduced from the pierced centre of the drill, the solid ball of rock vanished in a streak of dazzling white flame.

When the flame was gone there was no trace of any-

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thing whatever in the tube, and almost immediately the glass itself melted away and lay in small round beads on the table.

Acknowledging the cleverness of the demonstration, the Bishop had joined issue with Everett, reiterating the time-worn truism that no matter how extensive our knowledge of Nature, a greater Unknown always remains behind. Austin replied to this with, for him, unusual warmth, challenging the Bishop to a statement of the limits of scientific research, and Hearty very confidently instanced the century-old dream of inter-planetary communication.

"Science has not yet made a blade of grass, nor an acorn, nor a wild rose," he said, "but I suppose you will answer that it is only a question of time and patient perseverance; human skill, in my belief, has never yet created life, though your faith in Bastian's experiments leads you to think otherwise, but one thing I can confidently say, your boasted intellect—born, you assert, of inevitable atom-movements—has never done nor ever will. No man has ever yet been able to escape from the trammels of the earth upon which he was born; no man has ever yet been able to communicate in any way with any of the other worlds, and I think no man ever will."

"Well done, Hearty," said Ademas J. Killiker, our rich American, noted for his periods of quiet study and alternative searches after sensation. "I'll back you up in that. I aint much of a Sunday frock-coater myself, as they say in Texas, but I've a heap deep respect for the ancient verities, and I'll wager our friend here 100,000 dollars in good Yankee securities that this problem of interplanetary communication is beyond his power to solve. 100,000 dollars to nothing, gentlemen, and *if* I'm beaten I'll pay up like a man, without a groan."

We were all more or less excited by this time, though some of us were laughing, but Everett was cool and confident.

"Give me twenty-four hours, gentlemen, and I will give you my answer," fell upon us like a thunderbolt out of the blue.

We crowded round him with eager questions, mixed with a little chaff, but he was invincible to our importunities.

"'Till to-morrow, friends," he said. "'Till to-morrow."

He and I left the club together, and having promised to show him the proofs of an article I had written, in which scientific nomenclature was unsparingly used for the sake of effect, I took the opportunity of going home with him. My curiosity was roused, and for the sake of his daughter Ellen, if for no other reason, I was determined to know whether he had any ground for the acceptance of so wild a challenge, or whether—as I half feared—it was the first sign of a splendid intellect breaking down under the stress of its own abnormal activity. A few words here respecting my friend, will make what follows clearer, and explain my apprehensions.

CHAPTER II.

A Modern Materialist.

Austin Everett was one of the most fascinating people I have met—the most fascinating man with whom I have come in contact. There was a something magnetic, mesmeric in his very presence and bearing, and what the magic of his straight, medium figure, with its head of black hair, and keen brown eyes, failed to gain of your admiration or envy, the brilliancy of his mental powers compelled.

He was, it is true, outside the pale of orthodox science—his frankly untrammelled theories and his denial of the fundamental axioms of the exact school, excited the ire of that circle—but speaking impartially, I can say that his is the master-mind of the world.

His splendid discoveries and marvellous experiments in untrodden paths were shown only to a select few or to the members of the Röntgen, and being one of his most intimate acquaintances I came so thoroughly under the awe-impelling influence of his mind, that mine, notwithstanding a sub-current of weak protest, was moulded much in the fashion of his own, and I professed, at the Club and elsewhere, to be a materialist like himself, or, at the least, to believe that no other theory of the universe so well conforms to the facts of existence as they appear to the trained eye of a logical intelligence.

I say under protest, for constitutionally I am a religious being, clinging to old faiths, old laws, old hopes and fears, and nothing but Everett's semi-hypnotic charm could have held my inclinations in check. Sometimes I would argue with him, bringing forward in turn all the stock theological contents and the latest special pleading of the Christian scientists, sometimes falling back on Pantheism; but I was invariably worsted and beaten on my own ground.

She played one of Mendelssohn's *Lieder*.

"If you accept Spinoza and Wordsworth, and synonymise God with Nature," he would say, "I cannot contradict you. You simply endow Nature with another name. Call the universe what you will, with that I have no concern. The universe as a fact is unaltered thereby. But when you speak to me of Spirit, Being, Power, Deity, and the like, I must confess that you are using terms which do not correspond to anything within the widest range of my conceptions or inductions. You are using words which you cannot even explain to me yourself—which no one has explained—and I decline to admit such terms into any calculations of mine.

"Religion is an heirloom from the ignorant Past, a souvenir of the ape-like barbarians who projected their own feelings into rocks and trees and sea and sky, and

with religion, science has nothing to do. Science is of the Future, her glories are yet to come, her truths have yet to be fully established. I repeat, there is no avenue by which knowledge can come to man save through the channels of his senses, and through these comes no knowledge of anything other than immortal Nature—eternal matter.

"Therefore I decline to consider the baseless hypotheses of religion, exactly as I decline to regard the fourth dimension as anything more than a web of sophistry spun out of the cocoons of ill-formed minds."

From that position I could not move him, and that position was characteristic of the man. If in my heart of hearts I knew him to be wrong, I could not deny that on the surface he seemed invincibly correct.

Apart from his notoriety as an exponent of extreme disbelief, he was well known as a painstaking investigator in theoretical chemistry, and as a master of clear English. His "Refutation of Idealism" is itself a supreme masterpiece of analysis, and of his other works, "A Monograph of the Thought Nerves," has given him an international reputation.

His daughter Ellen, a tall, fair girl of twenty-five, was his one human tie. He adored her and she almost worshipped him. Under his training she had grown up in his ideas, though she expressed them differently—more gently, and with some tinge of sentiment infused into their dry bones.

At home, with Ellen occupying the place at table that her mother had once filled, Austin Everett unbent from his stern rationalism, and became as humane as any villa-dweller in St. John's Wood, and it was then I liked him best. It was thus I saw Ellen at her best, too—if she ever had a better mood than her usual brightness—and I think her winsome face had something to do with the frequency of my visits.

Such was Austin Everett—a genius of unparalleled order, whose daring stopped at nothing, who had no thought for Heaven, no care for consequences, in furtherance of his ceaseless inquiries into the how and why of phenomena.

As for myself—I was simply a bachelor of thirty, struggling, with the help of a small annuity left by my deceased parents, to gain a footing in the overcrowded literary world. I had few friends and fewer relatives, and had joined the Röntgen Club solely for the purpose of picking up a smattering of science to embellish my "copy."

The ruse was a success, and my knowledge of technical terms was already becoming commented upon in the reviews.

CHAPTER III.

"My Answer—Yes."

Almost immediately on reaching home that evening, Everett retired to his private study to make some important calculations, and left with Ellen, I had to suppress my impatience and beguile the time with turning over the leaves while she played one of Mendelssohn's *Lieder* with a soulful touch that thrilled me through.

I did not think the time ill-spent, and must confess that I was rather disappointed when Everett stepped into the room flourishing a paper covered with algebraic signs and equations, and said:

"So far I can see my way clear. I only want to know one more factor in the problem now. Will you mind sending a telegram for me, Millington? It is about this club affair, and very important."

Of course I would oblige, and rose to go.

"Shall you be at the Röntgen to morrow, Miss Everett?" I asked in the hall.

"Yes, Ellen will be there," said her father, putting his hand tenderly on her shoulder. "If, as I believe, I can drive another nail into the coffin of superstitious awe, she will like to be present at the operation."

I took the telegram and saw it clicked off to Neath, Glamorganshire, South Wales, to a Mr. H. Jones. It was very short and threw no light on my mental darkness.

Send me depth of deposit of white ore in vicinity. Forgotten figures. Everett.

I waited for the prepaid answer. It read thus:

Too late to measure borings to-night. Will wire full particulars in morning. H. Jones.

This left me no wiser than before, so there was nothing to do but wait till night.

The club-room was well filled when Everett came in with Ellen, and when he mounted the lecture platform, there was an attentive silence.

The Church party were in full force, I saw, and I noticed near the door some leading spiritualists and a noted Theosophist. I took a chair near Ellen and asked her if she knew what her father's answer would be.

"Yes, I know," she said, "but I should like you to hear it from himself. He is going to speak now."

Grasping the rail of the reading desk with the gesture so familiar to us, Everett stood a moment with his gaze on the Bishop and the American—who sat together—then straightened his well-set figure and plunged at once into the matter in hand, speaking as calmly as though he were dealing with quite an ordinary subject.

"For the benefit of those who were not here last night," he began slowly. "I will run over the incident that then occurred. I gave some of my new experiments, which show conclusively that all substances known to us can be utterly destroyed in a very small fragment of time, and I took occasion at the close to point out how irresistibly the conclusion was forced upon us that everything in Nature is mutable and subject to incessant change, and that only the substratum of which all things are built up is infinite and eternal.

"I then indulged, as at the Röntgen I have allowed myself to do, in a tilt at the various theistic theories of Nature that have come down to us from the darkness of the primeval and the middle ages. Our worthy Bishop took up the cudgels for his faith, and Mr. Killiker capped the climax by offering 100,000 dollars to nothing that I could not solve the problem of inter-planetary communication. I asked for twenty-four hours to consider the challenge, and I am here to-night to answer it."

There was a stir amongst the audience, and we listened breathlessly for his next words.

"Since last night, gentlemen," he went on, "I have worked out my figures and received the information I then lacked, and I have the unalloyed pleasure of telling you that the problem is solved. The puerile theory that the intellect is bound to this planet alone is dissolved into thin air, and to the question whether I can bridge the gulf of space, you have my answer—yes."

There was dead silence for a moment, as he paused. Then he continued:

"But I will be frank with you. At present the scope of my power is limited. I can promise you speedy transit from the earth to any of the planets nearer the sun, but I cannot—yet—go further outwards. I have hopes of accomplishing that result eventually, but an

unknown factor in my calculations has so far baffled my skill. Still, to reach Venus, Mercury, Vulcan, or the moon, will, I think, enrich the charities most munificently. Am I not right, Mr. Killiker?"

"Yes," said the Yankee, with a less confident smile than he had worn the night before. "I am ready to plank down the moment you prove to me, by actual experiment, that what you say is possible."

"I shall not only prove it to your satisfaction, Mr. Killiker," said Everett calmly, "not only to the satisfaction of the Bishop and all the members of the Röntgen Club, but to the satisfaction of the world. I have thought this matter out thoroughly, and I am prepared to stake my scientific reputation upon the promise that within twelve months from this date the civilised world will know that I have spoken truth.

"The abyss of space need no longer set bounds to man's genius. The worlds need no longer roll on in isolation through the pulsing ether. Gravitation, like its brother, electricity, shall yet be harnessed to the service of man. And in a year—in less than a year—from to-day, I shall have made this promise into a possibility. I need say no more. You have my answer, Mr. Killiker and Bishop Hearty—my answer to your challenge—yes."

No prophet of old ever impressed his followers with the sense of his sincerity and truthfulness more than Everett impressed us that night. A spell, real and powerful, no matter how transitory, fell upon us as he ceased speaking, and the uneasy fear I had felt for his sanity vanished like morning dew before the sun. I *felt* that he would be able to do what he said.

"Isn't he splendid to-night?" whispered Ellen, her face flushing with pleasure.

But after the first shock of the announcement questions were asked from all parts of the room, and such a babel of voices arose that the bell had to be rung violently for silence. Bets were being offered and taken freely on the result, and a score of impromptu discussions were being waged between the various sects.

"You wish to know the precise nature of the cosmic experiment I propose to make?" said Everett, when order was restored. "That I cannot tell you, except so far as to say that it will alter the Solar System and possibly change the coast lines of the world. To be exact it will occur in eleven months, six days and five hours from midnight to-night. More than this I shall not divulge until such time as I choose. And, gentlemen, that is all I have to say."

To add that the Röntgen Club broke up in unusual excitement, and went to its homes in a highly strung state of mind that rendered sleep fragmentary, would surely be superfluous.

"The papers will be worth reading to-morrow," I remarked, as I said good-night to Ellen and her father. "I noticed some influential pressmen present."

"Yes, and more especially the so-called religious and advanced journals a week later!" laughed Austin, in his quiet way. "But come up after breakfast, and we will look them over together."

Ellen's eyes said "come" unmistakably, and I promised. As I turned away, and the motor-cab rolled off through the slush of the winter's night, I noticed standing unaccountably near to me, a well-groomed Frenchman, who had only recently joined the Club. He bowed hurriedly and walked away, turning up his overcoat collar as he went as though to hide a passing confusion. I thought his conduct strange at the time, but the impression had worn off before I reached my rooms in Upper Sloane Street.

CHAPTER IV.

A Storm of Ridicule.

The papers certainly were worth reading next morning, and we three spent quite a pleasant hour commenting upon them. The social and literary standing of some of our members secured us recognition and column reports in the leading periodicals, and there were editorial paragraphs at our expense by the score. The patronising tone of the daily press came out in all its strength.

Said the ponderous *Times*:

Hitherto we have found little to deprecate in the doings of the erratic members of the misnamed Röntgen Club, but after the proceedings of last night—which are reported elsewhere—we cannot refrain from asking whether their brilliant genius is of that order which is so nearly allied to madness as to be indistinguishable from it.

The *Daily Telegraph* was even better.

The arrogance of the modern sceptic (said the paper) grows greater with the growth of science, not because science countenances disbelief, but because, in the face of science's *non-possumus* regarding the Unknown, materialism has to cry with a louder and more dogmatic voice to make itself heard. Mr. Austin Everett will surely become a very formidable rival to the revivalists if he can draw public attention to his cult by sensationalism every whit as devoid of good taste as that of the Salvation army.

"That is good; decidedly good," laughed Ellen.

The *Daily News* was astonished, the *Mail* righteously indignant, the *Chronicle* jocose, the *Post* sarcastic. Even the provincial sheets took up the refrain and joined in the chorus of condemnation veiled in satirical regret.

When we were through with them my host smiled good-naturedly.

"It is just what I expected," he said. "It is amusing. But did I not know and allow for the influence of heredity and environment, it would almost make me despair of the ultimate triumph of Truth."

"But the environment is changing, father," put in Ellen, with the flush of enthusiasm. "And in proportion to our power, we can mould its changes to the new ideas, and a step once gained is never lost. Science must prevail in the end."

"It cannot fail," said Everett. "And now I will leave you two to amuse yourselves till luncheon. This experiment will occupy a good deal of my time, and I must get one or two other things settled to-day."

Ellen gathered the papers together with my help, and we arranged them neatly on the bamboo stand in the tree-shaded window. Our hands touched in the process, our heads came near together, and I think that was when I first owned to myself that I was in love with her. I know that the winter sun seemed to have a brighter glow than it had the day before. Suddenly she looked up and asked me quickly—breaking the thread of my thoughts:

"Are you with father in this? Do you really believe he can redeem his promise?"

"You do," I answered. "and why ask me? Two days ago I should have laughed at the idea; now I feel sure that it can and will be done. And so, I think, feel most of the members of the club."

"I am glad of that," she said, regarding me with an interest that was very flattering. "Do you know, Mr. Millington, I sometimes feel very friendless when he is immersed in his calculations. I sit and think how few we unbelievers seem in the world in the crusade against ignorance. It would be so easy to go with the crowd, instead of always fighting Error and using one's time and labour to convince the thankless multitude that

Science is their only hope—that the things they love and worship are as truly idols as any images of wood or stone. It would be so easy."

Everett's influence was very strong upon me then, and I felt it was my duty to comfort her for the sense of weariness and loss that, in spite of all, will come at times to those who cast aside the spiritual and try to live by intellect alone, so I said:

"It would be easier, no doubt, but would it be as well? The path of duty is often thorny."

Her face brightened wonderfully.

"Thorny, yes; but the right path after all. You have driven away the cloud."

I do not care to put down more of what we said that morning. I can only say that the hours passed very pleasantly and very quickly, and that an invisible bond seemed to have been woven around us then, binding our destinies together, whose strength nor time nor circumstance has yet impaired.

I was a frequent visitor at the house now, but saw little of Everett for several days, so busily was he engaged in his abstruse studies. Then came the weekly papers and one or two reviews, and the doings of the Röntgen formed food for more weighty disapprobation and hysterical regret. The religious papers, with few exceptions, described the "vaunting declaration" of my friend as being little short of "presumptious," and all deplored the fact that in the nineteenth century a company of otherwise sensible men should have listened to such "balderdash," as the *Methodist Times* elegantly phrased it; whilst that organ of dissent, the *Inquirer*, was more severe in its strictures than the *Rock*. Even "Saladin," that prolific writer of sledge-hammer logic and exquisite verse, declared in his paper, the *Agnostic Journal*, that:

> The acceptance of such a wager is the sign of an ill-balanced mind. It is only braggart boasting. Though boasting of this kind seems peculiar to that crude of thought yclept "scientific materialism," whose science is only pseudo-science, and whose materialism is only a longer name for that blatant species of atheism so rampant in the eighteenth century, and which has long ago been weighed in the balance of reason and found wanting.

Everett read them all, then leant back in his chair and laughed grimly.

"For all your modern progress," he said scornfully, "your modern man is a very stupid animal. But these good people have done me a service unintentionally. They have given my promised experiment just the publicity it needs to make its success a lever in my hands in the future."

"Don't you think," I remarked, "that it would be well for you to send a letter to the papers shortly, answering your critics?"

"I will write," he replied, after a moment's thought. "The change I shall make is so momentous that the public had better be prepared for it in some measure. A hint I threw out at the Club ought to have led some to guess the nature of my scheme."

"And the experiment is—?" I asked.

"Another time, my friend," said he, putting up his hand, "another time."

With that I had to be content, and filled the next few weeks with utilising to the full the wave of curiosity regarding Everett to tide me still higher on the literary shore. I wrote up an interview with him—with his consent—rushed several articles dealing with novels having inter-planetary travel as their *motif*, and, for the first time in my career, got into the *Spectator*.

Ellen said that I was very smart; and even Killiker praised my cuteness—which was praise indeed.

CHAPTER V.

The Paragraph of Promise.

The publishing of Everett's reply evoked another outburst of press ridicule and supercilious doubt even worse than the first, so much worse, in fact, that my scientific friend evinced some irritation and declared that henceforward he would argue with modern stupidity no more.

Yet the letter he sent out through the Press Agency was free from the least suspicion of boasting or insincerity, and it influenced many who read it to believe in the man's ability to carry out his stupendous project. And an inkling of the nature of that project now began to get abroad. I will not give his letter in full, but only its salient parts and closing sentences.

"The time for placing limits to the advance of Science," he wrote, after recapitulating the situation, "is long since past. It is too late in the world's history now to say to the seekers after knowledge, 'thus far shall you go and no further.' It is only childish to stand on the shore of Infinity and bid the rising tide of Science come no higher. Science—which is trained intellect—will stop for no edict of prince, no canon of the church, no mandate of an ignorant mob. No one has ever yet devised means to hold science in check for long; no one ever will.

* * * * *

"I have been asked to re-consider my resolution, if it be a real one; to confess that I have perpetrated a gigantic hoax, if that be true. Confess the latter I cannot, because every word I have spoken in this matter is as earnestly and seriously meant to be taken as true as anything I have uttered in my life. Nor can I alter my decision. Religion and Mediocricy have challenged Science on the physical plane—the plane on which she has won her greatest triumphs—and Science accepts the challenge. My word is given, my reputation is at stake, my mind is firm and I cannot retract. The experiment will be made.

"At last, tardily, some critics have noted that the time I gave as the time of the proof of my statement, was coincident with the date of the next total eclipse of the sun visible in this country, and they have come to the conclusion that I propose, in some way or other, to establish communication of some kind with the moon. That conclusion is correct.

"On the date I have mentioned the world will know that the problem of inter-planetary transit has been partially solved. On that date a large sphere of white metal—equal in bulk to a sphere of iron weighing many tons—will reach the moon from the earth, and the phenomena attending its arrival at its destination will dispel the last doubt that may then be lingering in the minds of the most sceptical. It will be the greatest experiment of modern times; the precursor, I trust, of many more on a larger scale.

"On that date all curiosity will be at an end; till then the most inquisitive must curb their craving for knowledge as best they may. I absolutely refuse to grant another interview, to pen another line for the press, to give another lecture on the subject. Henceforth, I and those friends who are my friends will be as mute as the giant Sphinx that glowers over the hot Egyptian sands.

* * * * *

"But one thing would I say here to those who fear the advance of Science, or hold that her advance should keep pace only with the halting footsteps of the time-worn creeds. To you who have this fear, I say, cast it

out, banish it utterly from your minds. There is nothing nobler than the sacrifice of old faiths and cherished ideas for the sake of Truth. It is the climax of altruism. There is no danger in Honesty, in Knowledge, in Truth.

"Man's track through the past is shrouded in darkness, scattered with the skeletons of those slain in the wars of the creeds; his path through the future opens out before us an ever-broadening footway, made pleasant and fruitful by the Sun of Science and the spirit of Truth. Take this ideal to your hearts, then, this noble ideal of unflinching trust in truth, however distasteful at first it may be, and it will grow upon you and enthrall you, and you will find in it, through all your life, a comfort and a hope.

"Have no fear of the ultimate triumph of Intellect. The glory of Nature will not be thereby dimmed, the sacredness of Right will not be thereby weakened.

"Rather will these things be intensified and sanctified beyond measure, for we shall find that in securing the triumph of the human and material over the Heavenly and spiritual that we have laid the foundation of a surer and more unselfish Hope and Faith; a Hope that those who come after us will live in better days and by the light of reason only, and a Faith in Man to realise in himself all those noble and spiritual qualities with which his imagination has crowned its creatures.

"This Hope and Faith it is that has spurred me on to discoveries hitherto passed by, that is my life's incentive, and this experiment I am about to make I regard merely as one effort to bring Hope and Faith before the notice of a scoffing world."

That was his peroration. No wonder the orthodox were disturbed and the second storm of ridicule was worse than the first! Seldom has a champion of such advanced thought obtained so great an amount of public attention.

Our clique at the Röntgen, was, of course, delighted, but one or two members resigned, and there were not wanting people who declared, vindictively, that the whole affair was simply a skilfully planned plot to gain for infidelity that notoriety it ever covets but so seldom receives. At times, I, too, felt dubious, but the bright enthusiasm of Ellen was always potent to lead my mind captive when Everett's mesmeric influence failed.

For a week or two the public interest lasted, and Everett was the man who bulked largest in the public eye, then the excitement cooled down, and before a month was out the affair was nearly forgotten. The unsavoury details of a great divorce suit monopolised the attention of society, and life became more bearable with us thereafter.

I was now a daily visitor at the pretty house in St. John's Wood, enjoying Ellen's smiles of welcome the while I patiently waited to be initiated into her father's secret.

I had not long to wait.

CHAPTER VI.

"I Put You Upon Your Honour."

It had been one of those bright, warm days that sometimes break stern winter's sameness for us, and Ellen and I had strolled down the path to the green arched gate. Under the holly boughs we turned back to the house. On the way Helen suddenly stopped, cutting geometrical figures on the gravel with her cane.

"We are great friends, are we not, Mr. Millington?" she asked, *apropos* of nothing.

"We are more than friends I hope, Ellen—Miss Everett."

Her question had startled me, and the words were out almost before I knew. She was not offended in the least, nor affected surprise, as so many modern girls foolishly do, but simply looked me in the face and said:

"More than friends, *I* hope; but still we *are* great friends, are we not?"

"Yes," I replied hastily, encouraged by her frank confession, and still more by the light that shone in her dear brown eyes. "Friends who have fallen in love, Ellen. You and I were made for each other, dear, why should we live apart?"

As I spoke I seized her hands and drew her to me—we were under the shade of a little avenue of evergreens—and I finished the question with a kiss. She made no resistance, returning it willingly, but it was a pure caress like the kiss of an angel. Then she gently but firmly disengaged herself from my arms and stood apart.

"There is no design in Nature, Dick," she said laughing, "so how could we two be made for each other? Call our mutual liking a coincidence, if you will. No—I have not answered you yet! Give me a little time, Dick, before I say whether I will be your wife or not. Marriage is a contract not to be entered on lightly, on

"We are great friends, are we not, Mr. Millington?"

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the impulse of a moment, even on the strength of love. There are many things to be considered—age, temperament, health, financial position, etc.—and I should consider myself unworthy of my principles did I not test these matters by the test of cold reason. Give me a little time, Dick—and don't ask me until I let you—and I will tell you my decision. You know my inclination already. Yes, you may kiss me again, Dick; but no more until I give you leave!"

Her logic was unanswerable, and what could I do but obey?

I gave the required promise.

"But still we are great friends, Dick," she persisted. "And that being granted, I want to ask you as my friend to join with father in this scheme, to help him, in fact. That was what I meant to say when you put me off."

"For your sake I will do anything," I said rashly, "but to help Mr. Everett I shall have to know his secret."

"You will know it to-night. He is waiting in the laboratory now, to tell you. Once more for my sake, will you help him with it to the end?"

"If he intends to set the moon on fire, I will help him!" I cried, "if you wish it. Shall I tell him anything of what we have just said?"

"No, sir! I am old enough and intelligent enough, surely, to decide my destiny for myself. I should not be my father's daughter otherwise."

We went into the house together, and going straight to Everett's den, I knocked softly on the door. Even his most intimate friends were not allowed in there without permission.

"Come in," he said, and I went in and picked out an old chair and sat down amidst as strange an assortment of retorts and batteries and electric motors and mechanical appliances and chemical vessels and apparatus as ever I have seen.

There was no order in the room, and while some things were bright and clean with constant use, others were thickly covered with parti-coloured dust of unknown age.

Some of the implements I knew the name and use of, but more were unlike anything else in the world. What attracted my attention was a thick glass box upon a trestle table, in which a small ball of brilliant white metal was slowly rolling.

It was rolling along the *under side* of the top sheet of glass, very slowly, and as indicated by a compass near, *towards the west*. By the time I had noticed this it had reached the end of the box and rolled out with a click into one of the upper corners, and there remained suspended.

"A perfect demonstration, just in time!" cried Everett enthusiastically, "you have wanted to know the nature of my discovery—you see it now!"

"But I do not understand," I said, "what has this queer silver ball to do with getting to the moon?"

"Cannot you see?" he asked. "Will this help?"

And he slid the end of the glass box out so as to let the metal ball escape. It went straight across the room and struck the west wall with a sharp noise, and there remained, poised on nothing. The effect was uncanny.

"Still I must confess my ignorance."

"Which shows, I am afraid, Millington, that your scientific knowledge is of a literary kind only—very superficial. You have seen this white ball—which is not silver, by the way—pass through space in utter defiance of the earth's gravitation. You have noticed that it moves to the west only. You have seen that it gathers speed as it proceeds. Cannot you piece the facts together?"

"The sun is very near setting in the west," I said. "You have discovered some means of making this white

He folded his arms and stood before me.

metal responsive to the sun's attraction only. Still, can't see how that affects the lunar question."

Everett smiled gravely, stroking his iron-grey beard.

"Have you forgotten the date of my promise?" he said.

"The total eclipse?" I cried. "Then you propose——"

"To take an advantage of the fact that the sun and earth and moon are then in a direct line," he said, finishing the sentence for me. "However, I had better be more explicit.

"This white metal, hitherto unknown, and which I have named electrion is, as you surmise, subject to the sun's attraction only, or to be exact, to the total attraction of the large quantity of electrion which is a constituent of the sun's mass. As every schoolboy knows, magnetism is a specialised attraction distinct from gravitation; the affinity of electrion is a specialised form of magnetism. It is a something as distinct from normal attraction as the Röntgen rays are from the ordinary ether-tremors we call daylight. Given the knowledge, then, that this attraction of the sun is strong enough to move a mass of electrion here—as you have just seen—it is only a matter of accurate calculation and seizure of opportunity to transmit something from here to the moon at a total eclipse."

"But how have you discovered this electrion? And how do you know it exists in the sun? And how prove, that if sent, it will reach our satellite? And how keep this electrion on the earth at all if it is so strongly attracted upwards?"

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I paused for want of further coherence in my curiosity. Everett walked across the room and placed the white ball in his pocket.

"One question at a time, my friend. I found this metal—at least the ore of it—in a secluded valley in South Wales some months ago. It has taken me nearly all that time to smelt it down and secure the pure element. It is a somewhat difficult process, unique in chemical research, I flatter myself. Its indifference to gravitation, I, of course, could not help discovering when I had once got electrion absolutely unalloyed. There is no credit attaching to me for that. As a little reflection will show you a mass of pure electrion, unless held back by sufficient weights, will rise directly upwards at mid-day, rise in a slanting direction in the evening, and at midnight will have a tendency *downwards*. The uniformity of these phenomena soon suggested a possible explanation to me, a spectrum analysis put certainty in the place of hypothesis.

"Then you know, by spectrum analysis, as well as by deduction, that electrion exists in the sun?" I cried excitedly.

"I will show you. Come with me."

We went together into the domed shed at the back, where Everett's fine meridian circle telescope pursued the courses of the stars, and he placed before me a photograph of the solar spectrum. Upon this, a medium-sized band of faint colour, crossed by a number of almost indistinguishable dark lines, was indicated by an arrow and the letter E.

"Those are the electrion lines," said Everett, "observed in the spectrum of *A Cygni* and other stars as well as in that of the sun, and marked 'unknown' on all previous charts. Now see this."

He adjusted a small spectroscope over a tiny electric heating apparatus in which he had placed a few scrapings from the white ball, and presently, as the metal glowed red and dull, and then a brighter white, and became liquid, and finally rose and drifted west in a curling vapour, a definite spectrum was thrown on the receiver.

And exactly in the same position in the spectrum band as the marked lines in the photograph, was the group of dim dark bars of density. The demonstration was complete. I had no doubt now of his ability to "send a sphere of white metal, weighing several tons, from the earth to the moon."

"But how," I asked, remembering that speech at the Club, "shall you prove that this electrion has reached its destination? You surely cannot send a mass large enough for even our best telescopes to make visible on its way through space, or when hidden in some recess of a lunar crater."

He looked at me closely, half hesitating. Then he said, with sudden resolution:

"That, too, is easy now; but before I tell you I must put you upon your honour not to let the knowledge escape you nor attempt to thwart my purpose."

I thought of Ellen and gave my word.

CHAPTER VII.

Proof Positive.

Everett paced the dimly-lighted room once or twice before he spoke. Then he folded his arms and stood before me.

"I shall destroy the moon," he said.

"Destroy the moon?" I cried, horror-stricken. "Impossible! Incredible!"

"Both possible and credible."

"But it is too large," I said, "for any explosive known to man; and too far off. And the consequences?"

"If you will cast your thoughts back to my experiment at the Club on the night of the wager, you will remember that I then showed the working of a solvent powerful enough, if present in sufficient quantity and in vacuum, to destroy the sun himself. The moon is devoid of atmosphere. And have I not just proved that distance is no hindrance?"

"But the consequences?" I persisted. "Will not the destruction of one member of the Solar System disturb the equilibriums which, according to Leverrier, alone prevents the whole from falling together and rushing headlong to ruin?"

"The mere observance of the result will be a scientific treat of rare value," answered Everett thoughtfully, "but I do not think the result Leverrier predicted will follow. To begin with, the balance which he pretended to discover does not exist, his calculations being based upon the utterly false hypothesis that the sun and all the planets are rigid bodies. Still, the sudden displacement of a planet or satellite might precipitate a general wreck of our system."

"And yet you propose to risk that awful possibility?"

"I think not. What I propose is destruction—not *displacement*. The solvent with which I destroyed a granite ball in vacuum that night I can make in sufficient quantity to dissolve or reduce the whole mass of the moon back again, not merely to its atoms, not merely to the ether, but to the inconceivably minute particles of which the very ether-units themselves are built up. That being so, it is only a matter of smelting enough electrion in a spherical form, inclosing enough of this solvent within it, and setting it free at the right time."

"And when will that be?" I asked.

"The average speed of the electrion sphere on its journey will be very nearly one-fortieth the speed of light," he said, "though, of course, at the moment of impact, it will be much greater. A little figuring, which would only weary you, will show that it must be freed from control exactly nineteen and a half minutes previous to the instant of complete eclipse. At that instant it will strike the moon with inexpressible velocity and be shattered by the shock. The solvent will be dispersed from its air-filled chamber and have full play in the vacuum of space, and the moon, as visible and gravitational matter, will cease to be, will be blotted out of the universe for ever."

I stared aghast at the mental picture, a thousand strange thoughts passing through my mind; a thousand perplexities besetting me. Surely no one but this extraordinary being, heedless alike of God and man in his pursuit of knowledge, could have proposed so stupendous an experiment! Surely no one but himself could have convinced me of his seriousness and sanity in proposing it!

"And this terrible solvent of yours—this destructive liquid?" I asked. "How does it act, and how can you keep it stored in safety?"

"I cannot explain its action thoroughly to you," said Everett, standing with his hand on the door, which had blown ajar, "because I do not fully understand it myself, but know enough for all practical purposes. In my researches into the validity of Dalton's atomic theory—researches which led me eventually to accept the age-old idea of infinite divisibility instead—I penetrated some way into the secret of gravitation, the origin of force, the causes of electric manifestations, and this enabled me to make this atom-destroying compound."

"Its action is instantaneous, like the application of a flame to gunpowder, and in less time than it would take to explode a powder factory, all attractions—gravitational, molecular, chemical and etheric—which hold matter together, can be destroyed. The keeping of the solvent is very easy. It will not act in an admixture of oxygen and nitrogen—such as the atmosphere—and it is only necessary to inclose sufficient air with it in a closed vessel to render it innocuous. Besides being difficult to mix and requiring a long time for preparation, its range of danger on the earth is limited by reason of the air which envelopes us.

"Were any quantity, however, to be placed in a strong vessel and the air to be exhausted afterwards, enough energy would be loosened to work immense damage before the atmosphere could stop its course. A coal-mine, a town—London itself—might be dissolved into pre-etheric substance if enough of the solvent could be buried beneath in airless receptacles. So you see I had good reason for requiring your word of honour."

"A good reason indeed!" I said, shuddering. "It is a terrible knowledge to possess."

"Terrible in some hands, perhaps," he returned. "Useful in mine because useful to Science. But shall I give you a proof of my assertion that I have learnt the nature of that world-mystery, gravitation?"

"By all means," said I. "I do not doubt you, but I must confess to the average man's liking for 'signs and wonders.'"

I noticed something white gleaming behind a holly bush

As I spoke I stepped towards the doorway, which Everett was just passing through, and noticed something white gleaming behind a holly-bush in my line of vision. I looked closer, and for an instant, in the moonlight, I had full view of a human face, with an eager, demoniacal expression fixed upon it, like the glare of a wild beast. I was on the point of calling out to my companion when a cloud sailed under the moon and the face was gone. Everett pooh-poohed the idea of a trespasser in his garden, and though we very carefully went round the holly bush and along the base of the glass-set wall, we found no trace of anyone. He put my impression down to a passing fancy, but though I did not argue the matter out I was convinced that someone had been listening to our conversation with an evil intent, and that that someone was someone whom I knew but whose identity I could not then recall.

Everett went into the house and returned with Ellen.

"I must see this weird experiment," she laughingly said, as I adjusted the wrap more closely round her shoulders. "even if I get a cold in consequence! It is something so much beyond anything father has yet attempted. He is trying to navigate the ocean of interstellar space!"

"And I shall succeed," said he quietly. "It is only a matter of time, though at present I cannot see my way clear to such a happy consummation. I have told you I know the secret of gravitation. It is something like this.

"It is caused by the constant bombardment of all bodies in the ether by the finitesimally small ether particles which fill space. This bombardment, (for want of a better word, I use this term) comes equally from all directions, resulting in the radiation, from each body, of an infinite number of concentric spheres of force, of varying sizes and speeds, whose resistance to the progress of bodies through space is naturally greater as the bodies are far apart and less as they are nearer—'in inverse ratio to the square of the distance,' as Newton said.

"The size and age and form of these great force-spheres—and their consequent energy—must, in the case of every star or body in space, be different, since in Nature there are no two things alike, so that, if we could only trace these subtle ether-thrills to their sources, and construct bodies with surfaces responsive only to some particular thrill, we could send them to or from the star or other source, at our will, irrespective of any other attraction whatever. This I have partially accomplished.

"This roughened sphere I hold is responsive only to the earth-waves of rebounding force, and if I cast it upwards—so—it will travel away from us for ever."

The small thing he threw upwards vanished slowly into the night.

"This other sphere," he went on, "is responsive to some star-wave that I cannot yet localise, but if I cast it away—thus—it will take an oblique direction, inclining to the north. It is travelling now straight to the source of the ether-thrill to which alone it is sensitive."

The tiny object sailed out of sight with tantalising tardiness, rising but slowly as it went. I think that at that moment Everett's strange influence over me was at its height.

"I am satisfied now," I cried. "I will help you in your studies and your experiments."

"And you will not attempt to save the moon from her fate?"

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"I have given my word," said I.

With that we turned to the house again, and soon after I was speeding to my lonely rooms in a motor-cab, excited and confused with what I had witnessed, but still grappling with the problem of the identity of that white face I had seen in the garden. It was a face, I knew, that had puzzled me before, but do what I would I could not find the link between the present and the past. By the cheery fire that blazed in the grate, I sat and smoked an hour, thinking hard, but memory for once refused to answer my call.

"That night, I recollect, I went to bed in disgust with my mental powers, and passed without regret into the glorious land of strange, wild dreams.

CHAPTER VIII.

Under the Old Oak Tree.

After all these didactic disquisitions and uncanny probings into Nature's inmost heart, a reaction came, and I gave way to the commoner interests of life. I frequented one or two of the non-serious clubs to which I belonged, and wrote "*fin-de-siècle*" stories and small articles. I took Ellen to the Cinematograph Theatre several times, and gradually shook off the uneasy feeling that the incidents of that night had given me.

Then I threw myself into the work of assisting Everett at his task, which, I soon saw, would occupy the greater part of the year. All the smelting and refining had to be done by him, alone, in his workshop adjoining the observatory. Fortunately, his house was detached, and the back premises surrounded by a high wall, so that the strange work went on with little or no notice from the neighbours.

The delicate chemical operations took all his time, and my duty was the attention to the excavating and conveyance of the white ore in undemonstrative quantities from Wales, the purchase and storing of sundry materials for making the solvent, and the casting of several huge weights to secure our great electrion sphere when completed until we were ready to bid it adieu. All this was new labour to me, but interesting and even romantic, for did not Ellen help me, and did I not see the love-light in her eyes? The time passed very quickly, and the early days of summer were upon us ere we were well aware.

One morning, having very little to do, most of the materials being collected and Everett being busy like an alchemist of yore amongst his fearful and wonderful potions, metals, and retorts, Ellen and I went down by a light auto-waggonette into the country, and ruralised for a few hours round a truly rustic farm.

The day was gloriously fine; one of those rare warm days when the blood courses the swifter in your veins and you are roused to fresh, bright, generous feelings. There was a cheering warmth and freshness in the very air, in the welcome brightness of the increasing sunlight; a pæan of praise in the carols of the birds.

On the short grass lay trees of swaying shadow, banks of white cloud lay peacefully across the blue, a damp haze filled the distant valleys. The bursting buds, the golden jessamine, the early primrose—while yet a few dry leaves lay on the ground—the fields ploughed ready for the sowing, the gardens trimmed and dug, the sunshine showing up the smooth, bare outlines of the unclothed trees, the transparent hedgerows, the few sheep on the hills; all these moved us to a sweet contentment, a blissful forgetfulness of the world of strife and thought we seemed to have left behind.

"It is beautiful here," said Ellen, as we stopped under the branches of a giant oak and looked down a wide and undulating valley. "One could almost forget, here, that evil exists in the world; that work is necessary;

A neat French maid ushered me into a well-furnished reception-room.

that there is disease to fight with, error to combat, death to meet."

"And one could easily think that love and laughter, fruit and song, were all that go to make up life!" I cried. "One could easily forget that wagers must be won, and moons destroyed, for the sake of stately science!"

So we wandered on, idling in earnest and enjoying it withal, despite the advocates of constant toil, and so the day drew to its close, as all days must, and we started back for home. But under the branches of that giant, aged oak we stopped again, and I put my arm round Ellen's waist and asked her for the answer which I divined could not be long delayed.

She looked up into my face archly, not resisting my boldness, and said:

"Is it so long since I promised you to consider my answer—yes or no?"

"It is long when one is waiting, Ellen," I said.

"It has not been long to me," she answered, smiling. "I have seen you most days, Dick, and we have been working in a common cause—and—the time has passed very pleasantly."

"Then you are going to say yes?"

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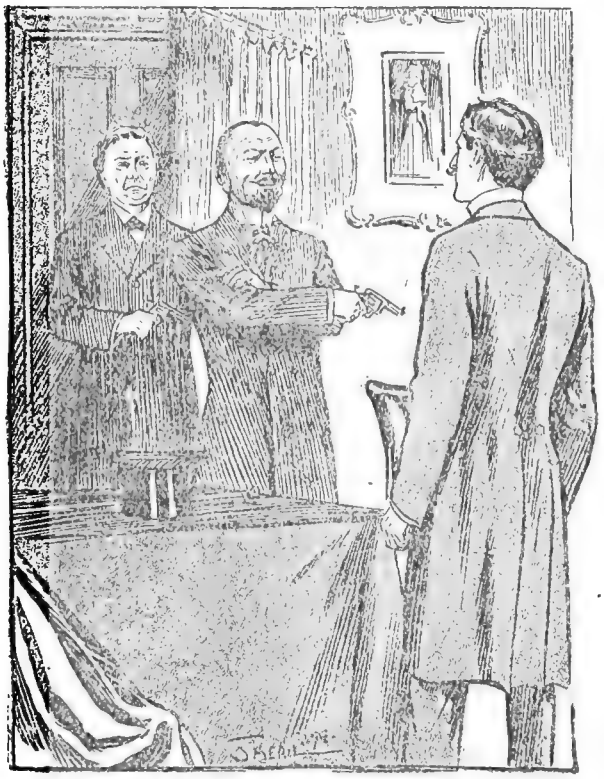
"Tell me what *you* think, Dick!"

"I think you are going to consent to be my wife, to share your life with me as I mine with you, 'until death us do part,' as the old service says. That is what I think, Ellen."

And I kissed her.

"Then you have told me my answer, dear," she said, laughing softly. "Yes, it is quite true. I cannot help say yes."

Then I kissed her again, and I believe—materialist as



A couple of men came in.

I professed to be—that in my inmost soul I thanked God for the joy of that day.

Tired, but content, we rode home through the cooling dusk, and going into the laboratory, where Everett was running a stream of his liquid solvent into a small vat, I put my hand on his shoulder and told him our wish.

He listened as gravely as though I was recounting the success of a scientific experiment of an uncommon order, and simply said, in answer to my query:

"Ellen is a good girl, Richard, and quite old enough to decide for herself. I could wish her no better choice. Let it be when you will, after we have once put this affair beyond doubt."

He turned away to his work in the glow of the red-running fluid, and I beckoned Ellen to come to us and watch the stream of vivid fire. I think that time was the only occasion I ever heard him call me anything more familiar than "Millington."

CHAPTER IX.

In the Clutches of the Anarchists.

It was, if I remember right, just two months before the eclipse that I received a note at my rooms one evening, asking me to meet the editor of a well-known society paper at an address not far from my own in Upper Sloane Street, and to bring the note with me. I thought the request strange, but as the editor was a personal friend of mine and had then some of my work under consideration, I put on my hat and went, not deeming it necessary to leave word where I was going. It was a large house which I had often noticed, and was kept in first-rate style.

A neat French maid ushered me into a well-furnished reception-room and left me. Presently she came again and said, "Wou'd I come this way?" It seemed curious, but still I complied, and was shown into a rather dark, study-looking room at the end of a right-angled passage.

"It was here that M'sieur wishes to speak to you," said the maid, in rather poor English. "He will presently to you come."

The door closed behind her with a queer snap, and I thought I heard other footsteps outside, but soon all was still. M'sieur, whoever he was, seemed in no great hurry to appear, and I grew impatient. Five minutes, ten, fifteen, twenty, passed, and still no sign. I rang the bell, walked about the room, banged the table, knocked on the door, tried it, *found it locked*, kicked it rang the bell again, and all without response. Everything was silent; there was neither sound of voices nor footsteps. It might have been a deserted house, buried underground, for all I could hear. Even the roar of London's ceaseless traffic found no entrance into that silent room.

After another frantic shaking and kicking of the unresponsive door, I turned to the window. That, too, was secured and bade defiance to my egress. It was strongly rabbeted and its panes were small, iron bars girded it, and the sashes were screwed together *from the outside*. There was no escape that way. Nor was the outlook from it promising. By a curiosity in the building of the house, it looked out into a sort of deep stone well, reaching from roof to basement and void, so far as I could see, of any break in the stone-work save the one I peered through. It was like the *oubliette* of an ancient castle.

Utterly perplexed at my treatment, I rang the bell violently a score of times, and then I sat down to consider my position. I did not know a single person who had any great grudge against me, anyone whom I could suspect—unless it was some editor whom I had pestered in season and out with doggerel rhymes in my early days—and I hoped that I was only the victim of an unpleasant practical joke.

Still, the uncommon message, the French maid, the locked door, the grated window—these were most suspicious.

I had got thus far in my cogitations when the door was quickly unlocked and thrown open, and a couple of men came in. One advanced to the table, the other closed the door and stood with his back to it.

Both had revolvers in their hands. The one at the door, a short, ugly-featured man, of a Teutonic cast of countenance, I had never seen before; but the other—who stood smiling cynically at me—ah, I had seen *him!* It was his face I had seen that brief instant in the moonlight in Everett's garden; it was him I had noticed listening when I said good-night to Ellen and her father

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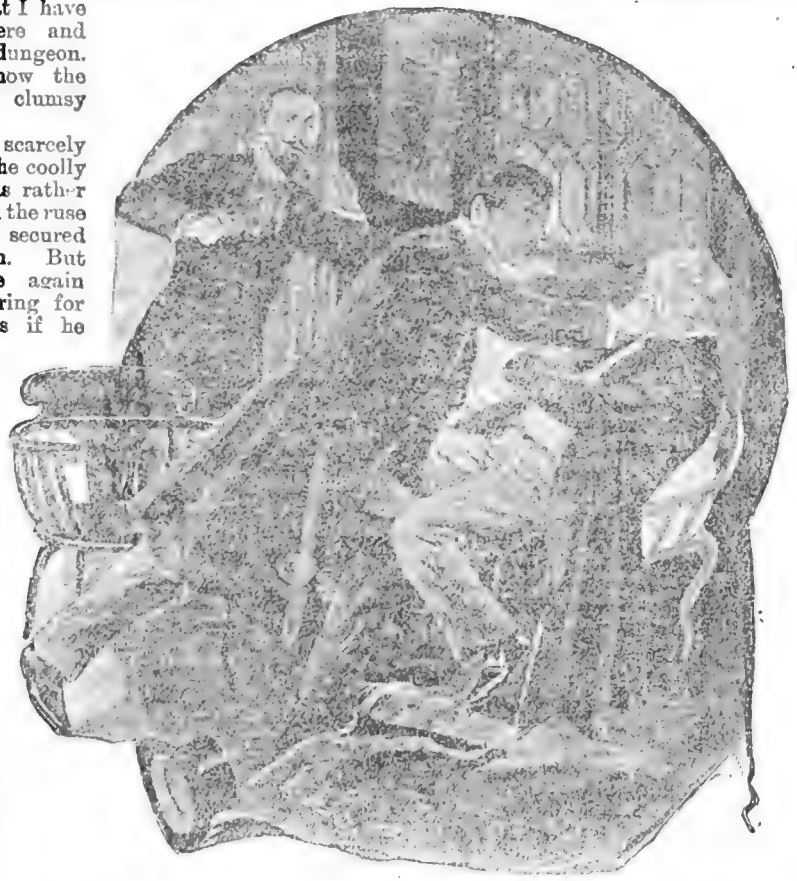
after the acceptance of the wager. It was M. Marachele, member of the Röntgen Club! He saw that I recognised him, and enjoyed my dismay, showing a fine set of teeth with his broad French smile.

"If M'sieur is agreeable," he said sauvely, "we will proceed to discuss the matter to which I am indebted for the honour of his presence. I have, as he will see, taken infinite pains to prevent our interview being unduly interrupted. M'sieur has doubtless satisfied himself upon that point?"

"I know nothing of this nonsense!" I cried angrily "I only know that I have been decoyed here and entrapped in this dungeon. I demand to know the reason for this clumsy trick."

"M'sieur is scarcely complimentary," he coolly returned. "I was rather priding myself on the ruse by which I have secured this conversation. But will M'sieur be again seated? I will ring for wine and cigars if he wishes."



I sent the German reeling from his seat by a well-planted blow between the eyes.

By this time I had taken the measure and character of the two men, and resolved not to precipitate any harm to myself that might be impending. The Frenchman, I felt, was one of these elegant gentlemen who would stick at nothing in his dealings with me, save to pink me off in the most approved fashion, while the stolid German by the door looked like a man who made up in seriousness and sureness for what he lacked in refinement and humour. I was completely in the power of these two men, and must needs be careful. I sat down.

"I will not trouble you to ring at present," I said, "but it would be well if you would tell me the motive you have for this unlawful detention. I have enough respect for my life not to attempt an escape under present conditions," and I glanced at the polished barrels.

"You are sensible," said the Frenchman, sitting down opposite to me; "you face an unknown danger with the true philosophy of a scientific unbeliever. In that I admire you, M. Millington, for I, too, am an enemy of Religion and a friend of Man."

He paused, but I was silent.

"M'sieur has nothing to say? Perhaps his scepticism is only skin-deep, like his science? However, if you will listen, M. Millington, I will tell you why you are here and what we demand as the price of your release. Come and sit here, Stutter, our bird is safely caged.

"It is very little we want, friend Millington," he went on. "Something you can give us without danger to yourself or to your somewhat slender bank-account. We simply want the recipe for making that wonderful and powerful solvent with which M. Everett proposes to destroy the moon."

"Which you will never get from me!" I said.

"That has yet to be seen," he answered with a true Parisian grin as his fingers closed on the trigger of his revolver.

"These little implements are marvellous persuaders, although I have other means of enforcing my request."

"Before I will even consider the request," I said, "I must know for what purpose you require this information. I must know who you are."

"You force me to tell you, then. And once you know, your death becomes a matter of imperative necessity unless you divulge this secret formula. I am M. Marachele, the unsuspected leader of European Anarchism, and I want this solvent to destroy—not the moon, but London. By some means or other I shall eventually obtain it, but unlike many of my comrades, I am a man of peaceful methods, so far as they are possible until the day of the social revolution." This was said ironically.

"And you expect me to assist you in that diabolical purpose?" I cried. "Your pair of consummate villains! I will not tell you anything!"

And springing suddenly from the chair I sent the German reeling from his seat by a well-planted blow between the eyes, and had my hand on the key in the door before he could recover himself. But before I could shoot the lock, M. Marachele's grip was on my neck and the cold barrel of his revolver to my temple.

"One effort more, and I fire," he said.

My hand dropped and I went back to the table. Stutter was on his feet again now, but beyond regarding me

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with a most malignant stare, was as undemonstrative as before.

"One more such attempt, and M'sieur will certainly pass into utter annihilation," said the Frenchman; "at any rate more speedily than he would if he grants the knowledge we so earnestly require."

"Why try to get it through me?" I asked sullenly, trying to temporise. "How do you know that I possess it?"

"I know *that*, beyond a doubt," he answered, with his most exasperating smile. "I choose you because your life is of no consequence to Science, and will not stop the great experiment. As a lover of Science I have a great desire to see M. Everett's grand demonstration, and I should not like to be compelled to kill so useful a man. Anarchy is already in debt to Science; she will be yet more so in time. Come, M. Millington, let us have your answer after calm thought, for I have another incentive to your consent, of which I have not yet spoken."

"And that is——?"

"If M'sieur *will* press me," shrugging his shoulders carelessly. "It is this. You are in love with M. Everett's daughter. M. Everett's daughter is at the present moment in my power elsewhere as you are here. If you consent to my terms she will be set free. If you refuse—— I need scarcely say more."

CHAPTER X.

Fencing with Fate.

"You fiends incarnate!" I cried. "You miserable hounds! Your devilish ingenuity is well worthy of the Anarchy you profess; well worthy of the colossal crime you have conceived. But I dare you to do your worst. I refuse!"

I wished my imperturbable foe to lose his temper and do something rash, but it was useless. He simply twirled his waxed moustache and rose to go.

"You are agitated, and do not see the consequences of your decision clearly, M. Millington," he said. "I will not take such an advantage of you. Let me put the facts briefly and plainly before you again. You and your lady-love are thoroughly in my power, but you alone know the secret, and you alone know my true identity. Tell me the formula, and Mdlle. Everett shall be at once set free. Yourself—well, you will be liberated when once the mine is laid that will place London in shapeless ruin. To release you before would be suicidal folly. Refuse, and both yourself and Mdlle. Everett will pay the penalty of death. I can say no more, but I will give you time to consider, to think clearly. I will give you twelve hours. It is now ten o'clock; at ten o'clock to-morrow morning you must decide your fate. M'sieur, I bid you *au revoir*! Come, Stutter."

They went out, locking and barring the door after them, and I was left alone with my very unpleasant thoughts.

I sat helplessly, I should think for half-an-hour, then I rose and paced the room trying to concoct some scheme with which to defeat the infernal plot. Surely a man was never face to face with such fearful alternatives. If I gave him the required information I was practically delivering the lives of London's millions into his merciless hands; perhaps preparing the way for the ultimate triumph of Anarchy and all that that implies.

I pictured to myself the day of doom for the unsuspecting city—the sudden melting away of the earth beneath in a hundred places as the solvent acted, the houses with their tenants, the streets with their crowded traffic, the great halls and theatres with their audiences, all falling headlong into formless wreck and ruin and dissolving into sightless mist; the soaring tongues of white flame, the desolation, the world-wide panic—and I groaned and clenched my hands, and said that I could not bear the sin of *that* upon my soul.

Then I thought of Ellen, of myself, and said in my heart that I could not be the cause of Ellen's death, even though a hecatomb of three million lives must pay for her's. And even for myself I shrank from death, life—with Ellen as a central joy therein—was far too bright to cast away, even for that dreamless rest of eternal sleep beyond the grave. In my desperation I grew frantic, and vented my frenzy on the door, the window, the walls, the floor, seeking some means of escape in the grey darkness of that awful night.

But there came no response to my shoutings, no result to my efforts, no sound from the busy outer world, and I sank back, exhausted, despairing, in my chair, as the soft light of four shaded glow-lamps lit up the room with their clear brilliancy.

All through the night the light remained, and at last, worn-out with useless planning and brain-cudgelling, I think I fell asleep. Any-way, I have no recollection of the lamps being extinguished, yet when I noticed the first glow of the dawn creep down the dim *oubliette*, the tiny filaments within the bulbs were no longer luminous.

I glanced at my watch mechanically; it was half-past six. I set it on the table listlessly and watched the fingers circling round to half-past eight. At that time according to my usual custom, I wound it up, with grim reflection, as I placed it in my pocket, that I might be run down before it was.

Half-past nine. My mind was not yet made up, though a feeling of resignation to coming self-sacrifice was stealing over me. If only I could communicate with Everett!

The two of us could surely contrive some plan to thwart these scoundrels. As I thought of this, a faint hope arose in my mind, a very faint hope, indeed, but a hope nevertheless, and if ever a man put more hard thinking into thirty minutes than I did that morning—In the midst of my plotting the door opened, and my two "friends" of the previous night stepped in. Both carried revolvers again, and after securing the door, both drew chairs and sat down to the table. Stutter was silent as before; Marachele was, if anything, more voluble and affable than he had been at first.

"Ten o'clock, M'sieur!" he said gaily, consulting an elegant gold chronometer. "As you see, I am punctuality itself. I have not kept you waiting the fraction of a second. Yet you looked tired, M'sieur, and you are doubt'ess thoroughly prepared for *déjeuner*. I beg your pardon a thousand times for my inhospitality, but I feel compelled to get this great question settled without further delay. You will place me under an infinite obligation, M. Millington, if you will answer my question of last night."

I felt that if I was to take advantage of the small, very small loophole of escape that I thought I saw, I must be very careful in what I said. So I replied:

"Before I can tell you my decision, I must know three things more definitely."

"And those are, M'sieur——?"

"First, the precise way you will deal with Miss Everett and myself in the event of my refusal; next,

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some further guarantee that you have Miss Everett in your power than your mere word; and lastly, some guarantee of our liberation if I consent. I must know these, or I decline to answer at all."

"M'sieur, you remind me of the fly who threatened the spider whose web was round him! But I see no objection to satisfying your praiseworthy curiosity. The guarantee you have of the truth of my assertions is the best assurance that, under the circumstances you have. It is the bond of my honour, my word."

"*Your honour!*" I said derisively.

"Yes, M. Millington," he said, keeping his temper admirably. "*My* honour. You have yet to learn that the word of an Anarchist is his bond; that he recognises no other bond; and that that is why he is in an eternal state of rebellion against all other bonds and laws with which the arrogant majority seek to restrain him. The twin principles of Anarchy, my friend, are love and truth, and love and truth only."

"Chiefly love, as evidenced in this proposed crime of yours and the means you are using to accomplish it!" I cried scoffingly.

He did not notice the interruption.

"Then consider," he pursued, "what guarantee more than this can you demand? I tell you, and it must suffice, that I will keep my promise, that you can depend upon my word. If you tell me the secret of the solvent, Mdlle. shall be set free to-day, and yourself just as soon as the fate of London is so assured that your liberation cannot prevent it, nor lead to any detection. You must own, most obstinate one, that this is simply self-defence. As to the other alternative, that is a simple matter. My comrade here, whose only love, whose only religion, is the Cause, will merely present you with certain small spheres of lead that are at present in his revolver, and you will pass abruptly into that state of nothingness which, as M. Everett would tell you, is the common lot of all intelligence in the endless time to come. And with Mdlle. Everett—the same."

"Then I must tell you the secret," I said, with an air of utter dejection.

He elevated his eyebrows slightly and shrugged his shoulders. Stutter coughed, and a sudden gleam of triumph shone in his eyes.

"As M'sieur pleases. He knows the inevitable result of either choice. Here are pen and papers—you will write it down."

Most unfortunately the materials used for the solvent were simple and easily obtained, though costly owing to quantity, so I had to write them down and then hesitate over the means of manipulation.

"I can tell you all but one thing," I said, at length, knitting my brows.

"And that one particular, M. Millington?" queried the Frenchman sharply.

"That one particular is the most important," I said. "It is the exact order in which the bi-sulphates are added to the clear solution. Any other order than the right one would produce a terrific explosion, an occurrence which even an Anarchist would prefer at a distance."

"Is this true?" asked Marachele, riveting his eyes upon my face and abandoning his suave manner. "Will you repeat it, or are you fooling to gain time? Your answer, or I shall try the surer way of obtaining the formula from M. Everett."

"I swear that I have told you the truth!" I said, keeping my voice and eyes steady, though small beads of perspiration stood out on my forehead. "I cannot remember that one point. Neither can I see what it would profit me to waste time, I am so infernally hungry."

"And you propose——?"

"To write to Everett, asking him for the complete formula, telling him that my life and his daughter's depends upon it."

"You are clever, M. Millington, but scarcely so clever as you think. You would put our friend upon his guard. But I must believe you, and perhaps your way is best. You will write a note—at my dictation. You will write this:

"Dear friend.—I am in a position of danger where neither you nor the police can reach me, and the price of my life is the complete formula for your menstruum, together with a small quantity of the perfected fluid. You must send it by the bearer of this note, asking no questions, or my life will be at once forfeited and your own will be in equal danger.

"RICHARD MILLINGTON."

Having no help for it, I complied, and handed the missive to the sardonic foe. He grinned, passing it to Stutter, who immediately went out, locking the door behind him. I was alone with the most dangerous man in Europe. He took out an elaborately worked cigarette case and presented it to me.

"They are Latakia," he said coolly. "They will beguile the two hours I have given Stutter to bring the reply. He will observe certain cautions, which you will of course perceive to be absolutely necessary in the case for my sake. At present my identity is wholly unsuspected by the omniscients of Scotland Yard, and I prefer it to remain so. Shall I tell you something about myself and the plan I have in mind?"

Affecting a stoical bearing I was far from feeling, I selected a weed and nodded an ungracious assent to his suggestion.

CHAPTER XI.

NECESSITY HAS NO LAW.

Of a truth, necessity has no law, and impelled by that inflexible power, I was busily perfecting the details of what, under ordinary circumstances, would have been a horrible crime. The man whom my plottings were directed against, rattled on unsuspecting.

"As you have no doubt guessed, M. Millington," he said, settling himself easily in his chair, "my membership of the Röntgen Club was simply to add to my knowledge of advanced chemical discoveries. It also tended to support my assumed character of a wealthy man of scientific hobbies. And though I hold the secrets of half Europe's social undercurrents and the lives of scores of well-known men and women in my grasp, there are only nine living persons besides Stutter and yourself who know that I am in any way connected with Anarchy. I am the leader of yearly increasing thousands who have never seen me, never heard my name, never even heard of me at all except as a distant guiding hand, a central brain to the movement, unknown, and because unknown, safe from the most astute spies of the Governments."

"And these ten?" I asked, resolving to learn all I could.

"Each of the ten nationalities of Europe has a chief organiser," he said, "and to these alone my present name and address and disguise is known. M. Stutter is the Prussian organiser, for instance; M. Emile Recluse is the Belgian, the English leader is——"

He lowered his voice involuntarily, and I started at the

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name I caught. It was that of one of the best known and most popular members of the House, sitting on which side I will not say.

"And I am in no danger from these," he continued. "I have not a scrap of Anarchist literature or material of any kind in the house, or about myself, and have never put my signature to any paper in connection with it."

"And now, with your kind assistance, I shall strike my greatest blow at civilisation and democracy. At my instructions London will be placarded with the threat of a vague destruction and an urgent appeal to all Anarchists to leave the city at a given date, about a week previous to the great event. A sufficient number of cylinders, fitted with an exhausting apparatus and half-filled with the terrible solvent, will be buried at convenient places, and presto! the thing will be done. The greatest centre and stronghold of capitalism the world has ever seen will be sent to everlasting destruction."

"And after that?" I inquired, with a feeling of loathing for the man.

"After that, Monsieur. Surely the rest is easy. If London, why not Paris? And after Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Petersburg, and all and every abiding place of power and wealth that will refuse to yield to the summons of the Army of Freedom that will spring up from the ranks of the common folk. And after that? An end of all government, an end of all law, and the beginning of the era of universal Anarchy and brotherly love."

"Such as obtained *before* laws were made and governments originated, and men ate one another and none could say to them nay—such brotherly love as that!" I cried, revolting at the vista of wholesale murder he so lightly unfolded.

"You are caustic, M'sieur," he returned, with the utmost *sang-froid*. "You have no philosophy in your nature."

And he relapsed into silence, until, at half-past twelve, the key turned in the lock and Stutter entered, carrying a folded paper and a small package. And looking at his face, on which success was written, I no longer hesitated over the resolve I had formed. If Ellen was to be spared, if London and the world was to be saved from becoming the prey of these human wolves, I must kill them both. There was no other choice; no other sure way.

In a few gruff words Stutter told how he had disguised himself at a comrade's house and then presented my written request at Everett's door; how my friend, after a little futile questioning, had complied with it, begging for news of me and of his daughter, which, the wretch added, with a truly German grin, he had earnestly promised.

I examined the glass phial he had brought, and saw that it contained a mixture of the solvent and manufactured air. So far, so good. I then compared the recipe with the one I had written, and found serious discrepancies. Two entirely wrong substances were included, and the order of mixing was entirely reversed. I deliberately twisted up the paper I had written to relight my half-burnt cigarette, and as its black shreds fluttered to the floor, with the keen glances of the two men fixed upon me, I rapidly thought out my procedure.

It was plain to see why Everett had done that. He suspected more than Stutter thought, and did not mean to give up the precious information without a struggle. Perhaps he would follow Stutter and track him here. Sooner or later. M. Marachele, with his vast secret organisation at his back, would obtain possession of the secret, would take a terrible revenge upon us, even at the cost of a thousand lives.

This spider at the centre of the web of Anarchy must die and his Teutonic comrade with him. With the remembrance of his cold-blooded words fresh in my ears, and the thought of Ellen in my mind, I was absolutely remorseless in my judgment. They must die, these two, and none of their comrades must know by whose hand.

"Well, M. Millington," said the Frenchman, "are you prepared to test this sample in our presence? We are dying to assist."

"Without pleasure," I answered sullenly. "But I shall want a large clear bottle, tightly corked, something small and hard to place inside for the purpose of the experiment, an air-pump, and a small hypodermic syringe. I suppose you have these things?"

"Certainly," said Marachele, "you will have to fetch them, Stutter; the maid's notice expired last night, and she went home this morning. You will find them all in my study."

The German went out, locking the door again; he never relaxed his caution in the least. Marachele, however, thinking I was completely in their power, carelessly walked across to the window, with his hands in his pockets. This act of imprudence was what I was expecting, waiting for. With a bound I sprang upon him and gripped him round the waist from behind, throwing him to the floor. He fell with an oath and a loud cry for help, but my weight was upon his back and I held my grasp like a vice.

"Remember, friend," I said, "you have taken care to make this room sound-proof, and shouting is of no avail!"

He struggled terrifically, but I was more frantic, and any moment Stutter might return. I lifted him bodily from the floor about a foot and then dashed him down head lowermost, with all my force, almost cracking his skull.

"Curse you!" he cried, "you——" but the sentence was unfinished.

I seized him again and battered him on the floor with a madman's strength and fury, stunning him out of all consciousness. Then with a hurried movement I drew the revolver from his coat and overturned the heavy table across his back.

As I stepped to the door, it opened, and Stutter with an armful of articles came in. He saw the evidence of the mêlée, and was about to retreat, but I was too quick for him, and had pulled him into the room and snatched the key from his fingers and locked the door before he could disengage himself from his burden. And then I was ready for him.

"One movement, and I will shoot you like the dog you are," I said.

He growled some guttural Teutonic oath and sprang at me, his hand going to his pocket as he came. I fired point-blank, three bullets in quick succession, and he fell like a log, not killed, but badly hit, and swearing horribly.

"Now, my worthy friend!" I said sneeringly. "You will have to submit to the undignified operation of being bound. My Frenchman is coming to, I believe, and I cannot be troubled with attending to both of you at once."

In a few minutes I had him secured to a chair with the tablecloth, and then I turned to Marachele. He was stirring, though scarcely conscious yet. I moved the table from him and bound him also, then sat and waited

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his recovery. I had plenty of time now, and no fear of interruption, and before I made an end of the wretches must know where Ellen was imprisoned.

Presently Marachele opened his eyes, and their malignant gaze, travelling round the room, and taking in the import of the scene, rested at last upon myself.

"So you have turned the tables upon us?" he said bitterly. "You are cleverer than I thought, M'sieur.

Gripped him round the waist from behind.

Of course you will make an end of us now—even at the risk of a police inquiry and a coroner's inquest?"

"Under usual conditions I should be foolish to kill you," I said. "I should give you up to the law. But as things are, with your secret society at your back to destroy us before we could give our evidence against you, I should be more than foolish to let you live—especially when I have no fear of justice. Have you forgotten the properties of the solvent here? the experiment at the Röntgen with the granite ball? Would any coroner's inquest have discovered the causes of that globe's demise? Are your bodies less easy to dispose of than lumps of granite?"

He started, and his face turned a still paler shade than its present almost deathly hue.

"Malediction! You are a fiend. But get on with your killing and let it be over. At any rate oblivion will be better than this fearful pain in my head."

"I have something to know yet, M. Marachele," said I. "Where is Miss Everett?"

"That I shall never tell you."

"Then I must try Herr Stutter," I said. "I will give you five minutes, Herr, to tell me the address of Miss Everett and how I may rescue her."

The German scowled blackly, darted a swift glance at his chief, and remained silent.

"Come," I urged, looking at my watch, "unless you tell me I will put a bullet through you without scruple. If you will tell me, and other things I may ask you afterwards, I will re-consider your fate. In four minutes now."

"I know nothing of the Fräulein," he replied sullenly, after a pause.

"Three minutes," I remarked.

"I swear I am ignorant," he reiterated.

"Die, then!" I cried, and steadying my nerves, fired. His head fell on his chest. I had taken my first life.

When the smoke cleared away I turned to the Frenchman.

"Perhaps—now—you will tell me," I said. "I promise you the same time and conditions."

"Which you would never fulfil," he groaned scornfully, meeting my gaze with a defiant eye. "You dare not spare me, so make an end of this fooling."

"You refuse to tell me?"

"I absolutely refuse."

There was a gleam of spiteful gratification on his sallow features, and on the verge of my second crime I hesitated. If I gave him an hour's liberty, or even life, how could I be sure, that with his clever brain he would not invent some means of escape, some means of communication with his subordinates? And if he escaped—Anarchy. The fate of the world hung on my hesitation. Yet if I did not know where Ellen was, how long might I not be in finding her? I made one more effort.

"If you will tell me," I said, "and give me the names and addresses of the nine other organisers through whom you work, I will spare you."

He met my desperate ruse unflushingly.

"You dare not," he said. "Your promise is a lie. Again I refuse."

"Then Heaven have mercy on your soul," I cried. And taking aim at his heart with a coolness and precision I could scarcely credit myself with, I fired. He sprang up, lifting the chair with him, then fell back dead.

As the report died away in the awful stillness of that charnel room, there came a loud knocking and kicking at the door, and unlocking it with pistol in hand ready for the worst, I came face to face with—Austin Everett and his daughter Ellen!

CHAPTER XII.

An Appeal.

I made a weak attempt to push Ellen back, but she linked her arm in her father's and resolutely went in. Then, throwing the revolver down, I sank upon a chair and buried my face in my hands, exhausted by the mental strain of the last twelve hours. Presently a soft arm stole round my neck and a sweet voice, that I had scarce dared hope to hear again, whispered in my ear:

"Don't give way, dear. This is terrible but not so terrible as we feared. You are safe, at any rate, no matter what has happened to these two."

"But how have you got here?" I asked. "I thought you were violently detained elsewhere."

"I? I have never been away from home," she said. "What made you think that?"

I had been duped, that was all. I explained, and

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little by little told them the whole story, not extenuating my double murder in the least.

"You have done right, Millington," said Everett, with his usual imperturbable calmness. "Such minds as these are only blunders of Nature in her efforts towards the perfect type of man she will never produce. They are better dead for that reason alone, and when their lives stand between civilisation and chaos the killing of them becomes a duty of the highest order, a duty demanded on behalf of all that is best in humanity."

"And what say you, Ellen?" I asked.

"I say that you have done nobly, Dick," she answered. "I think the crime would have been in leaving these men alive. The law could not or would not touch them, have taken account of a scheme of which only ourselves know the possibility. I love and honour you all the more, dear, for what you have done, even while I regret that you have been compelled to do it."

Those brave words of hers dispelled my last qualm, and I recovered my self composure.

"We have now to obliterate the traces of what has been done, as I intended," I said, and unfolded my plan.

I need not go into further detail here as to how we exhausted the air in the room and then destroyed the bodies and all evidence of their existence by the use of that terrible solvent; how we convinced the landlord that his late tenant had been suddenly summoned abroad and left the house in our hands—which conviction we clenched by paying the quarter's rent and giving a quarter's notice; how we re-papered the room ourselves on the quiet, to hide the effects of the solvent, and how I removed from that dangerous neighbourhood and took better if more expensive apartments nearer to St. John's Wood.

For the rest, the very precautions Marachele had himself taken to hide his identity and isolate himself from all ties was itself in our favour, and after a month's harassing work and suspense, we felt secure. Nor did anything occur afterwards to shake our sense of safety. But I can honestly say that that night and morning of horror added a year to my age, and shook my nerves so badly that they have never been thoroughly sound since.

How did Ellen and her father discover my whereabouts? That is simple enough. They suspected foul play when Stutter brought the strange request, and unknown to that now deceased worthy, followed him as fast as they could, Everett luckily recognising him after he had taken off his disguise on the way back. Ellen would have communicated with the police, but her father determined to sift the matter to the bottom himself first, and after a little trouble with the locks, succeeded in getting into the house.

There was only a month now to the time of the great eclipse, and after New Year's day the snow lay thick and hard upon the ground. I would have liked to sleigh and skate with Ellen, but all our time was now taken up with preparations for the grand *coup*. As it drew nearer, while her interest and mine increased, Everett's seemed to lessen. He did the routine work in a mechanical way and seemed always in a brown study. He spoke but little at meals, and took long walks alone in the clear, frosty mornings, left Ellen and I much to ourselves, and was altogether too pre-occupied with some subject of which we were ignorant to be a cheerful companion.

But Ellen and I were inseparable. I loved her the more each day I saw her, and our chief topic of conversation, after the usual nonsense that all lovers must talk, to be in the fashion, was the great event. To my surprise, Ellen grew to dislike the idea of it, and all my old apprehensions, allayed at first by Everett's hypnotic spell, revived.

And the nearer the time came, the less we approved of the colossal experiment.

We thought of the complete cessation of the lunar tides, and all that would mean to shipping coasts, and harbours. No tides!—for the solar tides are scarcely perceptible—no rise and fall of the sea! And the storm, the great world wave that would be caused by the sudden stoppage—what of that? In fact so troubled we became that we rose in open rebellion, and appealed to Everett not to send any solvent in the electrion sphere.

He heard us patiently, though his thoughts were with some other subject, we could see, and he answered us gently, but he was firm.

"I have given my word to the world," he said, "and the world shall know that when I speak, I speak in earnest."

"But think of the awful effects of the abrupt stoppage of the great tidal wave," I said. "How it will ruin our harbours and seaside resorts, as well as produce such a storm as will likely wreck everything afloat."

"I have thought of all that," he said, with some asperity; "and I have so little fear of it that I have chartered a steam yacht to take us to the Bermudas as soon as the affair is over, as we were talking last night. The *Lady Ellen*—a coincidental name, isn't it?—is now being fitted up at Southampton, and I propose that you and Ellen be quietly married the day before the eclipse, and that you start with me for your wedding trip the day after."

"If the yacht is not smashed up by then!" I said. "I must still confess to a fear of the consequences of this rash cosmic venture. I was looking at this scrap of old newspaper yesterday, dated 1896, and this is the damage caused by a sea wave from a simple local earthquake in Japan on June 15 of that year:

"In the prefecture of Aomori, 346 lives lost, 213 people injured, 840 houses destroyed. In the prefecture of Iwate, 23,309 lives lost, 23,340 people injured, 5,920 houses destroyed. In the prefecture of Miyagi, 3,344 lives lost, 1,184 people injured, 715 houses destroyed!

"In place of a local earthquake like that, put a sudden shake of the whole earth and a universal sea-wave, and then think of the frightful death-roll that will follow."

"I do not think your apprehensions will be fulfilled," said Everett, "though, of course, there must of necessity be an unknown factor in a problem of this magnitude. The wave caused by the ceasing of the tides will be a very small one, I am convinced, and will scarcely reach above high-water mark, and then the sea will subside at most places to a point midway between high and low water. The effect I am most in fear of, though so far as my calculations go, it will be a very slight effect, is a probable alteration of the earth's orbit—a nearer approach to a circular path, and consequently climatic changes. But these are only speculations; the experiment must be made before we can reduce them to certainties."

"That will be bad enough," I said, "but still I think you have underrated my previous objection. Just hear what the late Sir R. Ball wrote—almost prophetically—in his *Story of the Heavens*, Chap. iii:

"If the moon were suddenly struck out of existence, we should be immediately apprised of the fact by a wail from every seaport in

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the kingdom. From London and from Liverpool we should hear the same story—the rise and fall of the tide had almost ceased. "The ships in dock could not get out; the ships outside could not get in, and the maritime commerce of the world would be thrown into dire confusion."

"I do not think matters will be quite so bad as that," said Everett, "but we shall know best when we have seen. The whole future progress of science in the right direction hangs on the success of my project, and the vindication of my theory of the infinite divisability of matter. The moon must be sacrificed for science. After all, it is only a dead world for the sake of a living one."

"But, father," put in Ellen—as a forlorn hope, she afterwards confessed to me—"the moon is not so dead as by common consent she is reputed to be. You know that recent researches at Lick, Paris, and Arequipa have detected a faint twilight on her surface, a kind of vapour in the deep valleys when being lit up by the sun. As long ago as 1876 Dr. Klein discovered a small crater of then recent origin in the plain of Mare Vaporum. And have not great patches of vegetation been observed in Mare Nectaria for years past? Surely, instead of a dead world, it is a world just waking into life."

"I do not care to contradict you, Ellen," said the man of science, smoothing her soft hair with his delicate hand, "but I must tell you that in spite of these discoveries, the moon is a dead world, and will so remain till February 4th, next. The much-debated discoveries of Dr. Klein are open to more than a passing doubt; the vapour seen in the valleys and craters has been conclusively shown to be merely fine steam raised by the sun in the long lunar days from the ice into which the coldness of the long lunar nights has frozen all the water that now remains on its surface. And Dr. Johnstone Stoney has conclusively shown us how and why the true atmosphere of the moon has long ago escaped into outer space. Let me hear no more of this folly, Ellen; science cannot stand aside for sentiment."

"Of course not, father," said she, and the subject dropped.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Eve of the Eclipse.

Surely the sun shone never so brightly in the clear and frosty air of a typical winter day as that morning Ellen and I drove to St. George's and were made man and wife. For that occasion even Everett waived his stern materialism and his reserved manner, and he came with us to the church and gave his daughter away in the most approved conventional style, as though disbelief was a thing unknown to him, and Science and Religion had ever been at peace. As for ourselves, we cared nothing for the error that lay at the back of that impressive ceremonial. The fact that we two stood there with joined hands, and looked into each other's eyes with love, and knew that none could come between us from that day, was enough for us.

We lunched together in town, and after a drive in the park and a farewell to the few friends we had invited to the quiet wedding, returned home.

Everett at once relapsed into his usual reverie whilst busy putting the finishing touches to the white globe of electrion that lay in the workshop at the back.

Its many wedge-shaped segments, cast and fitted with mathematical precision were, all save one, adjusted in their places, and their outer ends formed the periphery of the shining sphere. In the centre, to which access was gained where the remaining section would be placed, were two hermetically-sealed chambers, one almost a perfect vacuum and the other filled with a mixture of that awful solvent and ordinary air.

An air-pump, worked by spring clockwork, connected the two chambers, and, when set in motion, would gradually transfer the air from the solvent tank to the other, and was so timed as to complete its task in twenty-five minutes. Six minutes were thus allowed for sealing up the last section and nineteen for the transit from the earth to the moon. There was sufficient energy latent in that innocent-looking fluid, Everett told us, to dissolve into pre-etheric substance a mass of matter equal in density to one and a half moons.

Ellen's arm shivered in mine as she stood with me, watching the final preparations, but we made no further appeal. We were content in our own happiness, and now that to-morrow would see the greatest experiment that the world had ever witnessed, our curiosity and excitement got the better of our fears.

That night, at Everett's desire—for his money flowed freely for anything connected with his pursuits, although he made no social stir—I sent off a cable message to the principle scientific centres of the world, giving them a brief outline of his scheme, and expressing a hope that they would utilise the precious opportunity of the last solar eclipse in the history of the world to the full. I also sent a note of invitation to Ademas J. Killiker, Bishop Hearty, and about a dozen of our most intimate acquaintances of the Röntgen, to be present at our house the next morning in time for the event.

Then, after assisting Everett to place in position the ponderous lead weights that were needful to prevent the movement of the sun-attracted mass of electrion, we went into the house. Ellen was busy till late packing a few things of her own for our start next day, and it was to a very short and far from restful sleep that we all retired on the eve of the eclipse. The sense of that impending event, which might have momentous events not even Austin Everett could foresee or remedy, oppressed me more than I cared to say.

But Ellen had grown confident and enthusiastic again, and when the first flush of the dawn came, with a clear sky fulfilling our most exacting desires, I, too, fell in with her mood. As I strolled down the garden after our hasty breakfast, a couple of electric four-wheelers, whose drivers looked aggrieved at being abroad so early in such chilly weather, drew up at the gate. Our select party of spectators had arrived.

CHAPTER XIV.

External Contact.

"What do you think of our home-made aërolite, Mr. Killiker?" asked Ellen, as after the usual greetings and the congratulations bestowed upon myself, we adjourned to the garden. "How do you like the workmanship of this little world that is soon to be traversing the wilds of space?"

"I think it's a smart affair," said the American ambiguously, "but I'd own to be an all-fired maniac if I believed *that* will blow the moon to pieces, as your note suggested, Mr. Millington."

Ademas J. Killiker, I need scarcely say, was sometimes brusque to the verge of impoliteness.

"And you would be right Mr. Killiker," said Everett calmly, as, watch in hand, he stood by the shining globe. "This is simply the vehicle by which I shall convey the fluid that will reduce the moon to pre-etheric substance

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as easily as it destroyed the granite ball in the glass on the table of the Röntgen Club the night we arranged the terms of this wager of ours."

"To be frank with you, Mr. Everett," said Killiker, with a Yankee's inexpressible smile. "I had clean forgotten that little arrangement until last night! But I'm game all through, and I've brought the cheque with me. I have it here."

And he tapped the breast pocket of his coat.

"Then you really mean to say," said the Bishop, turning to my friend, and looking rather scared, I thought, "that you seriously propose to destroy the moon, to alter the order of Nature that God has ordained, to interfere in the workings of the Solar System?"

"Exactly so, my dear sir," said Everett, in a rather superior tone. "Science, on the ceaseless march of her progress, cannot stop for the sent mental considerations advanced on behalf of a worn-out theology. Continent after continent, domain after domain, has fallen under her beneficent sway, and the time has come when the barrier that has hitherto bound her experiments to the earth is to be overpassed. Created or evolved, ordained or grown together of circumstances, no arrangement in Nature shall henceforth be sacred from the moulding hand of science.

"To me has first fallen the power to penetrate the pall of ignorance that surrounds us, to break the isolation that has held us in its bonds of silence through the centuries, and to me shall fall the honour of using that power to its fullest extent. To-day, for the first time in the history of the world—nay, for the first time in the history of the solar system—the gulf of space shall be bridged, and a planet shall be struck from its path and dissolved into utter oblivion."

"Oh!" said the Bishop, rather meekly.

Everett glanced at his watch and made some mental calculations, then put his hand on the lever of the clockwork in the centre of the sphere.

"Yes," he said, as though repeating a lesson he had learnt by heart, "in precisely one hour and thirty-five minutes after external contact, I shall touch this lever and set the mechanism working. Six minutes later I shall release the sphere from its weights, and nineteen minutes after that, at the first moment of total eclipse, it will strike near the central peak of the crater of Copernicus with a velocity that will shatter its solid mass to fragments, setting free the solvent—cleared by then of the air now mixed with it—to do its almost instantaneous work. There will be a bright flash of white flame on the dark ball of the moon, then a denser, utter darkness, and then the sudden sunlight again. The moon will have ceased to exist, and the tides will be no more."

None of us spoke for a time. For myself, I must confess that, somehow, his words awoke no response in my mind, and though the Bishop seemed overwhelmed by the almost superhuman powers that Everett claimed, something in me whispered that neither the destruction of a world nor of the whole system was of any weight in the balance between the eternally conflicting theories of Religion and Science.

The suggestion of the infinite that his words contained dwarfed his great experiment into puny insignificance, and the strong bias of my nature towards the ancient truths, rose up anew within me. The work of his mesmeric intellect, weakened by his refusal to listen to my appeal, was undone at last.

The spell fell from me completely. Where the universe had seemed so plain to my philosophy before, it loomed out indistinct and vast again, though with a glimmering of light and purpose from somewhere far beyond my ken. Only when I turned and looked in Ellen's eyes, and saw therein the reflex of that earthly love, which, after all, alone makes life worth living, did calm grow out of mental chaos, and out of unrest, peace.

"What if some mishap occurs?" broke in Killiker's voice upon my reflections. "Supposing you set the clockwork going too soon, or supposing this awful stuff of yours began to act on the earth now, and dissolved it away?"

"Nothing of that sort will happen, Mr. Killiker," said Everett. "And if it did, what then? Surely we have all read Schopenhauer, and 'The Crack of Doom?' But had we not better be waiting for the beginning in the observatory?"

We crowded in as well as we could, and waited for the darkness to creep on the sun's edge. The focussed image of the luminary glowed awhile in almost spotless roundness on the black screen, and then at the exact moment predicted by the astronomers, the sweep of a dark circle appeared on the edge and slowly advanced upon the disc.

"External contact is now passed," said Everett absently.

The darkness and the silence of the little observatory grew oppressive after we had watched that circle of gloom swallowing up the light for half an hour.

"I say," remarked Killiker suddenly, tired of long stillness. "This destruction of the moon is all very well, but I don't see how it advances the possibility of transit between ourselves and the other planets. To send something to one of them seems possible; to convey passengers would be rather difficult, I guess."

"Not at all, my dear sir," replied Everett. "I should only need to weld a sufficient mass of metal, other than electrion, into my sphere, to reduce its speed to reasonable limits. I could make it hollow and fit it with all appliances for maintaining life for months; make it, in fact, a travelling observatory."

"And how get back to the earth if you arrived at Venus, for instance?" put in another of the party.

"If the atmosphere of Venus is breathable," said the man of illimitable resource, "I could transform my sphere into a body that would be responsive only to the earth's attraction and would carry me safely back."

"And if the atmosphere of Venus was not breathable?"

"In that eventuality," said Everett, "the adventurer would never return."

"Phew!" ejaculated the American; "I kinder guess that sphere will never start with Ademas J. Killiker inside."

"By the way," said one of the others, "I was talking of this affair to M. Marachele about six months ago, and while ridiculing the possibility of anything of the kind, he pointed out with great detail how disastrous the effect would be, particularly remarking how the cessation of the lunar tides would act on the length of the day. As everyone knows, the tides have been the cause of the length of the day being prolonged from four hours to twenty-four, and this process will be enormously slowed down when there is only the slight friction of the solar tides to continue it. He also said that the inevitable outcome of thus leaving the solar tides to operate alone would be the arrival of a time—of course, in the remote future—when the earth would always present one face to the sun as Mercury does; as the moon does to the earth."

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"By which time science will be able to control the movements of the solar system as easily as it controls the constituents of a gas or liquid," said Everett. "But we will go outside now. It will soon be time to start our globe on its journey."

"*Apropos* of this," said the other, as we filed through the doorway, out of the darkness into the grey half-light, "has anyone here heard anything of M. Marachele lately? He seems to have left us rather suddenly."

"I have not heard anything of our French friend for some time," replied Everett, looking at me the while with admirable calmness,

The rest confessed an equal ignorance, and neither Everett nor I felt inclined to volunteer further information regarding him.

CHAPTER XV.

The Spurt of White Flame.

The black rim of the moon, the serrations of its hills and valleys silhouetted on the sun, had now crept half-way on the fiery disc. An extra chill came in the air, a breeze sprang up, the light perceptibly paled.

Fortunately, the sky was very clear, only a few faint wisps of haze floating high in the south-east, like the straying tresses of some diaphanous spirit of the starry deep.

Slowly, as we gazed in silence, the dark curve grew, the luminous arc decreased, and out of the dulling sky shone one or two faint dots of light—the planets and the brighter stars. One hour and thirty minutes gone—one hour and thirty five.

"Time," said Everett.

The others crowded round as his fingers touched the delicate lever of the clock-work, and released the remaining section of the sphere from its weights and fitted it in its resting-place. A few turns of three stout screws and it was secure. A minute and a half was yet left to us. The Bishop stepped forward agitatedly, and laid a shaking grasp on my friend's arm.

"If it is not too late, friend, I beg you to yet think twice—to desist from this rash experiment!"

"It *is* too late!" said Everett, shaking off the grasp with more anger than I had ever seen him manifest before, "and I would not stay it if I could. Cut the ropes Millington, and all of you stand clear!"

As he spoke Ellen passed me the long-handled knife we had prepared for the purpose. Four swift, shearing strokes of its keen edge, and the cords that held the weights together fell asunder, letting them fall. A moment's pause, a gentle rolling motion of the globe, and then——

"She's off!" cried Killiker.

The shining sphere of white rose slanting from the ground, soaring majestically eastwards towards the darkening sun. A second it loomed there, indistinct and vast, betwixt us and the far-off orb, then its size diminished rapidly to a dark spot sunk in immeasurable distance, that passed from our sight with the speed of the swiftest thought. Out of the east, as it vanished, came down a whispered hiss, a prolonged sibilation in the air, like the distant wailing echo of a long-drawn scream of pain.

We looked at each other with faces ashen grey in the twilight of the eclipse.

"What is that?" cried several voices together.

"It is the noise made by the passage of our sphere through the upper layers of the atmosphere at the rate of several hundred miles an hour," said Everett, closing his chronometer with a snap, "and in eighteen minutes the last eclipse will be over."

Not one of us spoke, each waiting in straining suspense for the moment fraught with such tremendous possibilities.

Fifteen minutes more.

The moon was nearly central over the sun now, only a vivid semi-circle of light fringing its inner edge. From behind it the radiant filaments and sheets of the corona began to glow with a pearly light. Arcturus, swung high in the heavens, shone out, with the main stars of Boötes and the Northern Crown, and one or two in Cassiopea, the Lady's Chair.

Twelve minutes—ten minutes more.

The line of sun was thin and bright, like the sweep of a sharpened sickle half-circling the bulking moon. The stellate halo of the corona encompassed it with a growing distinctness and brilliancy, while through its sheets of hazy glow shot here and there long bright streamers of intenser gleam. At the north and south, close on the rim of the sun, the solar prominences blazed out in lurid redness. The sky took on a darker tinge. Venus appeared, more stars twinkled into sight in the Greater Bear and the misty band of the Milky Way, while on earth the silence and dimness of the passing night had something awful in its strangeness. The cocks in the neighbouring back gardens stopped crowing and went to roost, the sparrows ceased their morning twitterings, a canary of Ellen's in the house burst into a quavering song.

Five minutes—three, two.

Surely the eclipse was total now. The body of the moon appeared of an inky darkness, not flat, but like the great black ball she really was. The corona was brighter, the prominences more vivid. Those great red sprays of burning hydrogen leapt in flames a hundred thousand miles long from the sea of whirling gases in which they were born, flickered and sank, and rose again with truly appalling speed. Out of the hearts of fiery tempests that would engulf a world, those flaming prominences darted out, piercing the lighter vapours like tongues of blood; twisting, sinking, rising, at the rate of 200,000 miles an hour.

The sky was now sprinkled with faint dot indications of its constellations of splendour, the air grew icily cold, and somewhere in the distance a dog howled mournfully. "What if, after all, Everett's experiment should upset the balance of the system?" came the thought into my mind.

"In one minute more—in thirty seconds—ten seconds five, one!" counted Everett calmly.

And then——

An instant of utter darkness as the lunar shadow swept swiftly over us—the utter darkness of full eclipse.

Then with a spasm of feeling I cannot describe—a strange admixture of dread, suspense, curiosity, bravado—I saw a dazzling spurt of white flame burst suddenly out from the blackness of the moon's disc, about one third of the diameter from the edge.

Bright, clear, intense, it shone for a moment—a moment in which I could count my heart-beats, and Ellen's as she clung to me—then a dull glow shot out from it in all ways, enveloping the stricken orb. Then it paled, contracted, and was gone. Another moment, and the solar prominences and the fringing glory of the great corona vanished, swallowed into the darkness, and only the stars shone in the black heavens.

* * * * *

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Whilst I counted a score that awful darkness lasted —a darkness that could almost be felt and heard. Ellen clung closer still to me, and all of us reached out hands to each other in the gloom that had devoured alike both moon and sun.

"What has happened, Mr. Everett?" asked Killiker, in a hoarse whisper. "Is everything going to eternal smash?"

"Not yet, gentlemen," said the man whose genius had shattered a world, speaking in his most cool and confident tone. "This darkness is merely owing to the vast etheric disturbance that has taken place between the earth and the sun. Light being a wave motion of the ether, it is inevitable that such a cyclone of chaos as is now raging where the moon once was should confuse or intercept it on the way. At the same time——"

The sentence was never finished. A cry of relief burst involuntarily from our lips as the pall of the blackness was suddenly rent asunder and the glorious orb of day broke fully into view. The stars shrank back into the depths of heaven, the air grew warmer, the sparrows twittered joyfully again, and the sun, resplendent as a burnished silver shield, shone serenely in the clearness of a perfect winter's day.

"Thank Heaven!" said the Bishop fervently

"That's just my feeling!" cried Killiker.

And it was mine, too. The glamour of my Materialism had worn off in those throes of suspense, and I knew now, that however vaguely, I believed in a Creator behind creation—a something behind the veil.

But with that feeling came another, an undefinable sensation, as of something that was changed around me —something that had happened, but which I could not localise at all. We all felt this and commented upon it, but none of us could assign other reason than that of an intuitive knowledge of some subtle change that the destruction of our satellite had caused. And that the moon was destroyed was beyond a doubt, for there we were in the glare of broad daylight, when the eclipse should have lasted nearly two more hours.

"Well," said Ademas, fumbling in his coat with nervous fingers, "I've lost what I thought the surest thing in creation! Here's your cheque, Mr. Everett, and your hand on the affair."

"And your signed receipt," said Everett, taking a folded paper from his pocket and passing it to the American.

CHAPTER XVI.

To the Tideless Sea.

"Well," said Ellen, after our guests had taken their departure. "I suppose there is nothing more for us to do than to start for the Bermudas—if our yacht is not wrecked by this."

"Waiving that unpleasant contingency, I think we cannot do better than start as soon as possible," I said. "In fact, I ordered a cab from the Motor Depôt to be here at ten. I have thought this matter out, and I should not be in the least surprised, after the message I sent to the scientific world last night, and the events of this morning, if an attempt be made to mob us in our own house. A tremendous amount of damage will very likely have been done along the docks and warehouses of the Thames, and the evening papers will be sure to give full particulars of our share in the result. We had better be getting away."

"I am ready," said Ellen.

"As you wish," replied Everett indifferently, falling into his thoughtful mood again, and standing by the table with his hand on the edge of it, in an attitude so familiar with him at the rail of the lecture desk in the Röntgen clubroom. "As you wish, Millington. I am glad I have got rid of that cheque again to the members, for them to enrich the charities."

"Do you really think the people will be so infuriated, Dick?" asked my wife with some anxiety.

"I am afraid so, Ellie," I replied. "We must get away from England as quickly as we can. Where's my overcoat?"

And my forebodings were not ill-founded. As our luggage-laden auto-cab rattled down the road at ten-thirty, the driver putting on all the speed that it was worth under the impulse of a "fiver," we saw a large crowd surging up in the direction of our house, a typical, angry, London mob, ready for mischief, and evidently under the influence of great excitement. They passed us, however, and I felt relieved when at last we were safely *en route* on the rail, speeding to the south-west.

A couple of seamen came racing along the sand.

We spoke but little on the way, and I must confess that I felt rather ill at ease regarding the reception we might meet with at Southampton, if our identity were to become known. And in these days of lightning news and hourly editions and profuse illustrations, that was more than likely. However, I tried to re-assure Ellen that we should get through all right, and felt rather more settled when I had drawn from Everett the welcome information that, fearing something of the sort, he had bought the yacht in the name of Arrowsmith.

As the train rattled along, we became aware that an unusually heavy wind was against us. There are tides of the air as well as of the sea, and the sudden stoppage of the lunar aërial tides had provoked a gale. It tore in howling gusts past our windows, jarring the loose frames unpleasantly, drowning our voices with its deafening roar as we swept under bridges and through cuttings; it made the electric locomotive hum and throb laboriously in its efforts to keep headway; so violent, indeed, it grew, that the coaches rocked and swayed with an appalling motion, every moment threatening to leave the flanged rails. No mishap occurred, however, and at last, with a hoarse shriek of defiance, we thundered into Southampton thirty-seven minutes late.

The platform was a seething mass of humanity, every individual of which seemed to be possessed of one absorbing motive—to secure the next train inland, anywhere. Here and there through the dense crowd the active newsboys wriggled, selling the morning editions of the local so-called "evening" sheets at fancy prices.

"Eve—ning pi—per! Colossal Crime of the Eclipse! Destruction of the Moon! Fearful Storms ragin' on Land and Sea! Wrecks and Damage!" rang their

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KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR. KSR.

shrill, high-pitched voices in our ears as we elbowed our way out of the crush and hired a motor-cab down to the shore. I tossed a shilling for a copy and hurriedly glanced over it as we went, Ellen looking over my shoulder.

Of course the news was only telegraphic and teleponic, and therefore fragmentary, but it was terrible enough to inflame the people against us.

From nearly every sea-port in Europe came the tidings that a colossal wave had smashed most of the shipping there, had wrecked sea-walls and forts and piers and docks, and in some cases had flooded and demolished whole streets, with loss of life in every case. Also a terrific hurricane of unusual extent had worked immense havoc, sweeping some districts with the fury of a cyclone, decimating villages, wreck-strewing towns.

At Southampton its force had been greatly moderated for some unaccountable reason, but there, nevertheless, its effects, combined with the sea wave, had been so destructive that thousands of visitors and people of independent means had taken flight inland as fast as the trains could carry them.

In London, over a hundred lives had been lost, and much shipping sunk or battered out of usefulness. A late telegram stated that a large crowd of excited dockers and others had smashed the windows of the Röntgen Club,—which happened to be deserted,—and had then gone on to the house of the man whose rash genius had enabled him to perpetrate this gigantic sin against humanity, with the avowed intention of treating him to lynch law.

"Fortunately for him, and for his daughter and her husband—his accomplices in this unprecedented crime—" commented the sapient journalist, "he had early taken flight, and the mob could only vent its excusable vengeance by looting and wrecking the house."

"Isn't it dreadful?" said Ellen, looking at me curiously. "I never thought it would come to this. Don't you wish we had never had anything to do with this scheme?"

"I do, honestly," I said. "But that's all over now. What we have to do is to get away with whole skins, not caring whether we ever come back or not. I daresay your father will have no regret on that score, and you will only leave your friends; but I," I added bitterly, "I leave behind me a lost reputation; a promising career cut short."

"I know, Dick," said she, "but *that* is all over now. In some other country, under another name, with me to help you on, you will win back all, and more than all, that you have lost. Have courage, dear."

And right before her father's face she kissed me.

"I have gained more than I have lost already," I said, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, "in gaining you, sweet. But here we are at the shore—it is as desolate-looking a spot as I have ever seen."

Desolate, indeed. The sea was half-way out, and not rippling as its old time custom, but sullenly seething in slow currents and rapid eddies, and strewn with floating wreckage. The wind was blowing great guns out in the Channel, whilst upon the drained sands lay stranded scores of luckless craft, including several fine steamers of considerable tonnage. One of the hotels on the sea front was partially in ruins. Very few people were about the water's edge; kept away, doubtless, by the fear that the worst might not yet be over.

Of this I was glad, and learning by cautious inquiry from an old sailor that one of the few vessels we could see dotting the sea yonder, luckily escaped from the storm, was our own *Lady Ellen*, we at once walked down to the new shore line and engaged a boat to pull us out.

At the last moment, just as our man was about to push off far enough to float her, a couple of seamen came racing along the sand, shouting at the top of their voices. I had noticed them watching us some time, but had put it down to mere curiosity at seeing anyone venture seaward so soon. But it was not merely that. One of them waved a copy of the evening paper in his hand, and that was enough for me.

"Shove off!" I cried to our man. "We cannot wait! Take no notice of these fellows!"

"Stop her, mate!" cried the foremost. "Them's three of the biggest criminals alive! It's them wot's done all the damage! Stop her, and let's take 'em up the town. It's them, I tell yer, by their pictures here!"

"Take no notice of them!" I shouted in our man's ear. "They are a couple of liars. I will give you a fiver if you will take us out!"

"Times is hard, captin," he said, with a grin. "Make it ten, an' I'd take you out if you was Be-elzebub hisself."

"Ten it is then," I agreed. "Hands off, fellow!"

The nearer of the two sailors had dashed into the water up to his knees and seized the side of the boat. The other was close behind him, and, attracted by the shouting, people were running from all directions.

I seized an oar and struck the grasping hand a heavy blow, he loosened his hold and then renewed it, endeavouring to upset the boat. I struck again fiercely, once, twice, with all my force, and with a howl of pain he let go just as our man caught him with his fist behind the ear. He fell with an oath into the water, and the other, thinking better of his own skin, stopped to assist his comrade to his feet. We were afloat now, and our sailor sprang in and took the oars. We were safe.

No attempt at pursuit was made and, of course, as the crew of the yacht knew nothing of our identity, we were received with due deference and shown to our quarters as the screw began to spin and our prow was pointed for the Channel. I gave the boatman his promised ten pounds, and Everett, saying little, added another five, and he dropped astern very well pleased with his pull.

That night, as the *Lady Ellen* went spinning merrily down the tideless sea, under the sparkle of the starry sky, we three paced the deck in silence, wrapped in our own thoughts; two of us, at least, enfolded in a deep content. Suddenly Everett roused from his reverie and stopped, remarking with a sigh of relief as though speaking to himself:

"So that is settled."

"The dream of inter-planetary communication?" I asked.

"That is no longer a dream, but an established possibility," he answered slowly. "I have not given any thought to that since we disposed of M. Marachele. The problem which I have solved in my mind these last few weeks is the greater problem of inter-stellar travel. My next experiment will be a journey to one of the nearer stars."

I did not cast any doubt on his ability, nor challenge it with a wager. Nor do I now. I am willing to wait the course of events, leaving them to be guided by a greater Intelligence than his.

And meantime, I have a fresh career to make, and Ellen will be with me and will help me.

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The Lustre Lasts!

Pyn-Ka Leaves no Scratches!

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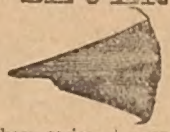

C. BRANDAUER & Co's CIRCULAR POINTED PENS

These series of pens neither scratch nor spurt. They glide over the roughest paper with the ease of a soft lead pencil. An assorted sample box for 7 stamps from the works, Birmingham.

NOSE MACHINES as worn by Nobility. Shape altered permanently by few weeks' wear, from 9/9 each. Red Nose Cure, Medically Approved, 3/9. Pamphlet, "Cause and Prevention," 1/-; particulars for stamp. Mention Paper.
LEES RAY, Specialist, South Castle St., Liverpool.

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FINE ITALIAN MODELS, 13 Red Maple Ribs, 7s. 6d.; Brown and White Ribs, 10s. 6d.; GENUINE ITALIAN, with 15 Maple Ribs, 15s. 6d.; ditto, 17 Rosewood Ribs, 17s.; 19 Rosewood Ribs, Pearl Inlaid, 24s.; ditto, superior, Closed Machine, 30s. Magnificent De Meglio Model, Rosewood, 50s.; ditto, superior, 63s. Genuine De Meglio, finest-toned instrument made, £5 15s. For cases, strings and pick, see list post free. All with machine heads and bent sound boards. Crate and carr. free.

JOSEPH RILEY'S,
N CONSTITUTION HILL, BIRMINGHAM.

Don't Cough - use

They at once check the Cough and remove the cause.

The Unrivalled

One Lozenge alone relieves. Sold everywhere, Tins 13½d. each.

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Complete Iron frame, Brass Pin Plate, Nickel-bolted Wrest Plank, Check Action, Full Trichord, Full Compass, Riveted Hammers, Handsome Walnut Case, Inlaid Marqueterie Panel, Sconces, Trusses, etc. Tone and touch perfect. Guaranteed 25 years. 28 guineas, at 10/6 per month. Delivered free on payment of 10/6. Approval. Catalogues Free.

ORGANS. GENUINE AMERICAN.

Imported Direct. Solid Walnut Case. Mirror Top, Music Case, 2 Knee Swells, Mouse and Dust Proof, 8 Stops, 3 Sets of Reeds, 14 Guineas, at 6/- per month. 10 Stops, 3 Sets of Reeds, 2 Octave Couplers, 15 guineas, at 7/- per month. Illustrated Lists Free. Kindly mention this paper.

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PARCEL OF 1898-99.

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR CARDS AND NOVELTIES.

A Magnificent Collection, containing:

1. Twelve assorted designs in new and seasonable embossed floral relief cards; beautiful folding and trifold cards; choice autograph greeting cards, landscapes, &c., &c. A superb packet; quality unequalled; nothing better could be wished for.
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The whole forming one of the most unique parcels ever offered to the Public. Suitable for Lady or Gentleman. Send for one at once. You will be delighted. We pay the postage and send the parcel securely packed by return for 1s. 9d.

Prizes for Everybody. See our Splendid Christmas Offer of

£250 IN PRIZES.

To purchasers entering the following contests:

1.—A TTSHIC NI EIMT VASSE NNEI.
2.—HNOTSYE SI HTE SETB PILCYO.
3.—TTEEBR TAEL HANT NRVEE.
4.—EEYRV LOUCD AHS A SELIVR NNIILG.

£60 amongst those who solve four. £30 amongst those who solve three. £15 amongst those who solve two. £10 amongst those who solve one

DIRECTIONS.—Re-arrange, to represent well-known proverbs, as many of the above lines as you can. Copy those you find out on a sheet of paper, placing the respective number to each, and post it, together with your order for our "Yule-tide" Parcel and P.O. or stamps for 1s. 9d. and a stamped addressed reply envelope for prize, etc., to *ALLAN WESTON & Co., Card Publishers, 188 Strand, London, W.C.*

Prizes of £30, £25, £20, £15, £10, £5, ten of £1, twenty of 10s. are also offered, full particulars of which will be sent with the parcel. These prizes are easy to win and well worth trying for. They will not be divided.

CONSOLATION PRIZES.—£10 will be distributed amongst any competitors who fail to secure a prize.

The Competitions will close on Saturday, December 31st, and orders from those participating should be sent in without delay.

The prizes will be despatched on Monday, January 2nd.

Orders will be sent out same day as received, together with a notice informing competitors how many of their solutions are correct.

Remember, every purchaser of our YULE-TIDE PARCEL must win a Prize.

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YOU AND I.

You will observe that this week I am offering a hundred sovereigns instead of the usual fifty. A sovereign will do much towards helping to cover the expenses incidental to Christmas. All you need do is to write your name and address on a post-card and direct it in the manner laid down in the conditions on page 830.

G. H.—The number of explosive compounds known to chemists at the present time exceeds one thousand. A quarter of a century ago there were less than fifty.

C. T.—Scarlet is the colour used for mourning at the burial of an unmarried woman in Brazil. The coffin, the hearse, the trappings of the horses and the livery of the drivers must be of that hue.

Ele.—The method of artificial respiration employed in drowning cases has proved effective in the resuscitation of several persons who have apparently been killed by electricity, especially in the familiar form of lightning.

A. T.—The air-tight compartment theory in the building of ships was copied from the nautilus. The shell of this creature has a number of cells or compartments into which air or water may be admitted, enabling the nautilus to float or sink at will.

Lena.—Gatwick racecourse was originally a dairy farm, the proprietor of which had an idea that he could pump the milk through pipes to London, and thus save the cost of carriage.

Arthur.—The Swiss post-office conveys anything from a post-card to barrels of wine, scythes, and bundles of old iron.

A.—I don't know of any more wonderful vegetable in the world than the truffle; it has neither roots, stem, leaves, flowers, nor seeds.

F. T.—You have won your bet. Female fish of all species are considerably more numerous than males, with two exceptions—the angler and the catfish.

H. P. P.—So far as I know the stamp duties paid by patent medicine makers show that four millions of pills are taken by the inhabitants of the United Kingdom every week. In France the quantity is about half. Only about one million are taken by the people of Russia. The Australians are the biggest pill-takers in the world.

F. L.—You are late with your invention. A German scientist has succeeded already in propagating sponges artifically. His original outlay was £1, cost of maintenance almost nothing, and a crop of 4,000 sponges as a result.

CONDITIONS OF JUMBLE STORY COMPETITION, SEE PAGE 831.

The lines in the story which will be found on page 831, have been all mixed up. Cut each one out and paste it up where you think it should go. Then write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in their rearranged order. £2 2s. will be sent to the competitor who is correct or most nearly correct, and a copy of the Earl of Desart's "Raid of the Detrimental" to each of the next fifty. In the event of a tie, the prize will go to the first arrivals. Date of closing, Tuesday, December 27th. Mark your envelope "Jumble." The letters in the title and author's name are jumbled, and should be correctly given, and pasted on the paper containing the effort.

Jim. — The brain of man is more highly convoluted than that of any animal in the world. The lower the animal in the scale of intelligence, the smoother the brain.

Lisbon. — On the island of Lewchew grows a tree about the size of a common cherry tree, which possesses the peculiarity of changing the colour of its blossoms. At one time the flower assumes the tint of the lily, and again shortly after takes the colour of the rose.

Wee-wums.—The two astronomers to whom you refer were Chinamen. They were put to death by the Emperor for getting drunk on the night when an eclipse was due.

Peter.—A "size" in a coat is an inch; in underwear, two inches; in a sock, an inch; in trousers, an inch; in gloves, quarter of an inch; in hats, one-eighth of an inch; in a collar, half an inch; and in shoes, one-sixth of an inch.

Gladys.—A hundred tons of cats' tails were recently sold in one lot for the purpose of ornamenting ladies' wearing apparel. Assuming that an average cat's tail would weigh a couple of ounces, this would mean that no fewer than 1,792,000 pussies had been killed just to supply this one deal alone.

Egbert.—(1) A person who has totally lost the sense of hearing in one ear, although he may imagine the defect is of little consequence, cannot locate the direction of a sound to save his life, even when the centre of disturbance is quite near him. (2) I have never heard of flies coughing.

B. N.—The church of Naples, and most other old buildings in that city are infested with mice. The clerical authorities keep a large number of cats in the churches to make war on the rodents, and during the services these cats may be seen walking among the congregation or sitting in front of the altar.

Grace.—In Germany all employers are obliged to insure their workmen, even when the employment is temporary and unpaid.

Patent.—The number of applications for patents filed at the Patent Office every week averages 500 at the present time.

Choo.—A peculiarity of the blind that there is seldom one of them who smokes. Soldiers and sailors accustomed to smoking, and who have lost their sight in action, continue to smoke for a short while, but soon give up the habit. They say it gives them no pleasure when they cannot see the smoke.

Pat.—It is not Dublin but Belfast which is the great tea-drinking city of the United Kingdom. Everybody, high and low, drinks tea of the finest quality. The merits of different brands are a continual subject of discussion, and the stately mansions of tea-merchants, which are rising everywhere in the suburbs, testify to the prosperity of the trade.

G. K. asks: "Is there any instance of benefit resulting from an earthquake?"———The port of Ouzoun Ada furnishes one answer to your query. This port is on the Caspian, and the starting-point of the Trans-Caspian Railway to Samarkand. About three years ago it was visited by an earthquake, and it was afterwards found that the basin was much deeper, which rendered it possible for far larger vessels to enter than had previously been the case.

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These Machines have been supplied to Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace, Admiral Boardman, Her Excellency the Countess Preysing, cousin to H.I.M. The Empress of Austria, a relative of the Prince Regent of Bavaria, Lady Hampson, Sir W. Wiseman, Bart., Sir W. Percival, Bart., etc.

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"We have examined the A.B. Cycles, and find them well-made, high-class machines. The firm are thoroughly straightforward."—*Cycling*, August 6th, 1898.

"Knowing the method on which the A.B. Cycle Company's business is done, we can honestly recommend the firm."—*Athletic Record*, September 3rd, 1898.

SEND ANSWERS EARLY.

Make up the best sentence you can out of Eight Words, the first letter of each word commencing with a letter of "NEW MODEL" in proper order, thus: "*N*ow *E*verybody *W*ill *M*ention *O*urs, *D*elightful, *E*asy, *L*uxurious."

This sentence is only given as a rough example of what you have to do."

ABSOLUTELY FREE.

We ask you to buy nothing before allowing you to participate in the Prizes. You pay nothing to enter, and even if you receive one of our regret notices—and we make no secret of the fact that hundreds are unsuccessful—you are only out of pocket for the cost of two penny stamps, which the Post Office gets the benefit of.

First Prize, £23 A.B. Safety, fitted with A.B. tyres.

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Second Class (9 prizes) £23 Cycle for £9
Third Class (12 prizes) £23 Cycle for £10
Fourth Class (15 prizes) £23 Cycle for £11
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Sixth Class (20 prizes) £23 Cycle for £13
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☞ **TAKE PARTICULAR NOTICE.**—COMPETITION IS NOW OPEN and **closes Saturday, December 31st 1898.** Results will be declared as soon as possible, although it may be a fortnight afterwards before all replies are posted.

Winners of prizes must clear them within a week or ten days, otherwise machines unclaimed will be passed on to the next in rotation. Enclose loose stamp for postage of Result of Competition. As so few are able to call and inspect the machines, **we guarantee to refund the full amount** paid for a Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, or for one of our Consolation Prizes **if the owner is not perfectly satisfied** with it on arrival. We cannot give any money or other prizes in lieu of cycles, and consequently cannot enter into any discussion relating thereto. One solution only allowed to each competitor. Disregard of this regulation renders any Prize liable to forfeiture.

£100 We offer this Reward to any lady or gentleman able to prove that we have ever in the whole course of our existence sold our cheapest machines under £15 cash either to any ordinary customer, agent, dealer or shipper. It is impossible for any English firm to sell a machine of the highest grade under £15; the material alone costs from £9 to £10, and A.B. Tyres cost an additional £3 or £4.

Mark letters "SHORT STORIES" on top corner of envelope, and address to the Managing Director,

A.B. CYCLE CO. LTD., 59 & 60 CHANCERY LANE, HOLBORN, W.C.

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